

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

SANTINIKETAN
VISWA BHARATI
LIBRARY

826.094



5

KAMALA'S LETTERS

TO HER HUSBAND

BY

R. VENKATA SUBBA RAU, B. A., B. L.,

High Court Vakil, Madras.

SECOND EDITION

MADRAS

"

ENGLISH PUBLISHING HOUSE, MYLAPORE

1904

All Rights Reserved

KAMALA'S LETTERS

TO HER HUSBAND

INTRODUCTION

IN presenting to the world the letters contained in this volume, I am not unmindful that they are extraordinary, and would set curiosity at work regarding the identification of Kamala, as also evoke criticism which might stamp both the letters and their authoress as being no more than pretty fancies. Indeed, before I finally resolved upon the publication, I had myself passed through both stages. The great curiosity, at first awakened in me to discover the learned lady, soon gave place to doubts as to her existence and the genuineness of her productions, but when I reflected that after all there was nothing in the letters which should necessarily domicile them in the domain of Imagination, and that they merely described and depicted events and characters of everyday occurrence in Hindu life

society, and remembered too, how much that was true and real was often disbelieved by the best of human judges, and how much of falsehood cleverly woven found ready acceptance with them, I withdrew from the rash conclusion into which I had all but rushed, and resolved to decide the question of publication, entirely upon other considerations apart from the genuineness of the letters, which seemed to me immaterial, or rather assuming the genuineness to exist, upon which I confess I am not in a position to make a definite statement to the contrary.

From this it is clear that my connection with this volume is in a capacity not far different from that of an editor, and its exact character will be seen from the following narrative of the circumstances which have led up to its publication.

One fine Sunday morning, not many months since, after breakfast, I was lounging in my easy chair, with the latest news in hand, and fell deep into a reverie, when my boy brought me a large volume, carefully packed in brown paper and liberally tied up with blue-and-red twine. I took it from him with a happy feeling of expectancy, which seldom fail to experience when any letter parcel comes to me, with the single

exception of the Subscription Book; and though the size of the packet put the suspicion into my mind, I knew, from the style in which it arrived, it could not be that ever-recurring pest. I found a cover addressed to me lying within the meshes of the twine, and taking it out with some little trouble, I opened it and began to read the letter, which, like the address on the cover, was type-written. It bore no date or place and ran as follows:—

“DEAR SIR,—I don't know how to apologise to you for intruding upon your valuable time with this letter and the packet which accompanies it. The idea has been in my head for nearly six months, but I could not for a long time muster up sufficient courage to approach you with it, which I now do with some diffidence, though in the full hope that you will not discard my prayer without the deepest consideration or discredit my statements as fibs and fictions.

“I will not attempt to explain to you the extent of the calamity which has befallen me. I will leave you to gather it from a perusal, which I assure you will be worth your while, of the manuscript volume I herewith send. I have written it as legibly as I could, though I am ashamed that my best writing is pretty

bad and I cannot write my own language as well as I can English. But I had no way out of it, for you see from the confidential character of the communications I could not entrust the copying to anybody. These letters reveal the whole story to you, and I will only add that I am at present a most unfortunate being, whom a strange inexplicable irony of fate has practically deprived—for she is still living—of one who, only a few months since, was life and soul to him but is now a hopeless monomaniac dreading and hating him as one would do a treacherous friend or a mad dog.

“I know you are not Theosophist, and perhaps you would brand me as a monomaniac, too, for the idea that has induced me to take all this trouble, which I trust will not go in vain. Let me tell you I am absolutely innocent of any conduct, such as entered into the imagination of my beloved spouse and reared in her soul the poisonous ever-growing weed of jealousy, which is now casting a dark shade upon her life and mine. As such, I cannot think that my unceasing prayer for her recovery will remain unanswered for ever, and I have begun to believe, fondly it may be, that the combined prayer of thousands of intellectual people will achieve the end sooner

and with greater certainty: for I have ever put faith in the great power of the Human Will, which is but a particle of the Infinite Will, pervading and controlling and regulating the miraculous machinery of the boundless Universe, and I also literally believe in the old saying—*Vox populi, vox Dei*.

“I am aware that the task I thus gratuitously impose upon you is one not free from trouble: for of course I expect you to do the letters into English, in order to bring them and their unfortunate authoress before the best cultivated minds of the world. But I know no one else that could do it half so well as yourself, and having always admired your facile pen and your tender heart so full of sympathy for the helpless and unhappy, I send you the MSS., in the hope that even if you should spurn my theosophical idea as the sick child of a sorrow-smitten brain, you may, at least for the insight the letters furnish into Hindu social life and customs, deem them worthy of publication. Do I encroach, sir, too much on your kindness and good nature?

“I need hardly say I leave everything to your decision and discretion. I have copied out the originals exactly as they were written, adding nothing and omitting nothing, altering only the names to prevent identification. If

the letters appear to you too good not to be fiction, I can only hope the day may come when you will alter your opinion, and should feel thankful to you all the same if you could publish them as desired. But should you after all decide against the publication in any shape, I beseech you, in the name of Honour, to destroy this letter as well as the MSS., for indeed you cannot return them to me, and I assure you the world shall never more hear of this sad tale. Believe me, truly yours,

“*Krishna*”

The signature was not type-written, and I noticed as much before I got half-way through the letter, and failing to recognise the writing or guess the writer, I told my boy to show up the person who had brought the packet. Nor was I in the least degree surprised to learn that he had gone away, for by the time my boy returned, I finished reading the whole.

My curiosity was now at its highest. I broke the ligatures on the packet, of which there were not a few, and opened the bulky volume. I had of course no idea of perusing the whole of it just then, and glanced through the first few pages to see what it was like. But these took me on to a few more, while these, in their turn, extended my perusal

further and further, until at length, not knowing even that I had lunched in the interval, I found myself at the end of the book!

I then began to discuss to myself the genuineness of the letters, but I changed my opinion so often, I was soon tired of it and confined my criticism to the merits. The letters seemed to me certainly of unparalleled interest, even as a short tale of life, by whomsoever written, though I felt inclined to think that the feminine hand and heart were visible throughout.

How could all this be a mere meaningless day-dream? Was I to publish the letters in English as desired? It were no easy task, but I could not resist the request which almost grew into a temptation. Once resolved, I sent my soul into the MSS., and drinking of their spirit have poured them out in the form in which they appear in this volume. I have however taken but little freedom with the original, except by way of pruning a word here and a sentence there, which appeared to be repetitions natural enough in the best-written letters; and though at first I was personally inclined to alter some of the names, I had no alternative but to retain them as they were, for fear of falling into the real ones by a double change.

And now, having said all I have to say,
I leave the reader to read and appreciate
this volume as it deserves to be; and even
to the carping critic, I make bold to say —
Read and enjoy it!

THE EDITOR.

1st June 1902

LETTER I

WHAT ominous signs, my lord, within these two hours! The sun was just setting as I was returning home, and he struck me with a queer fancy—a very queer one—that he was smiling in mockery at my grief! Then, our black fellow broke from control and hurled us along so recklessly I was in mortal fear of my life. When I got here, an infernal cat met me at the threshold, and to crown all, when I came in, Krishna did not greet me—not one syllable! Do you suppose, Beloved, I have still any nerve left within me?

It may be all superstition, but it has stung me to the quick, and now nothing can soothe my mind except your sweet encouraging presence. But that is impossible. Every minute is increasing the distance between us, and I am wondering if our hearts will ever be separated—the two which love has fused into one. It is an event I cannot think of—a catastrophe too awful for me to contemplate,

There! There! the noisy rogue, silent as death when I came in. Hold—hold—[—]you little devil! *Hold*—as you love your slender neck! '*Kamala dear!*'—'*Kamala dear!*'—[—] I had almost risen from my seat to meet you as usual.

My own, why indeed have you left me here? Have the curses fallen on my head? Oh my fears! my fears! Heaven knows the uneasiness in my mind!

LETTER II

BELOVED,—I don't remember what I wrote to you last night, but I feel it were better not to have written it. My grief had thrown me into a profound sleep, and I got up this morning, revived and refreshed, and full of delight to hear the sound of your sweet name. It was Krishna! I went to the dear creature at once and released him from his little prison; stroked his pretty plume and gave him a kiss for his welcome note, and another by way of compensation for the curses he had received last night. But, greedy bird, he pecked three more on my lips and cheeks, and such deep ones too, I thought some one had told him about your departure! I hope you will not hate my little pet, your own dear namesake.

Now it is day-time, the bright light of the sun has dispelled the doubts and fears of darkness, and I feel vastly different. What a change the orb of day makes in one's condition!

The good omen with which I awoke from sleep this morning was not without fruit. For before it was nine, the postman brought me your loving letter, which you wrote in the train, and which I love all the more for its shakes and scrawls.

Yes, love, I will try to follow your teaching. But I am a woman—a *girl* as you are pleased to call me! And what girl can learn her lessons without the master by her side—especially lessons in love? But let me gather strength by remembering your words and assurances; for, though I can never reconcile myself to our separate existence, I believe in your wisdom which has prescribed it under the circumstances.

'Only for a year'—'stray visits whenever possible'—'awful hot place'—'unsuited to a delicate girl'—ah, your arguments convinced me at the time—such is your power over me! But now, they do not. I accept them only as a duty—to obey you—to please you.

I stay here with my parents because you bade me; *not* that 'they may be pleased,' as you were kind enough to suggest. No doubt, I love my father and my mother—they are dear to me and near. But *you* have become nearer and dearer, and this great magic you have worked in two short years!

Dearest, you told me to curb my love, to write to you every day, and write all news which may come to light. But I am yet unable to control my steed. So let me stop and take to the veena ¹ for a while.

¹ The *veena* is a Hindu musical instrument having seven strings, something like the guitar but larger. It produces the sweetest music and is a favourite especially with Hindu ladies, the Hindu goddess of Learning — *Sarasvati* — being represented as playing this instrument.—EDITOR.

LETTER III

BELoved,—I didn't send you a line since Monday—can you guess why? Even to-day, I had resolved on the same course, but I have changed my mind for fear my silence might make you uneasy beyond endurance. Do not fancy, dearest, that I have been a disobedient girl. *That* I have never been, nor ever shall be. I obey you in all things. Indeed, my highest bliss is to please you—by following your direction. But, try as I may, I cannot do it half as well as you of the sterner sex!

If this letter should meet with the same fate as those I did not send you these four days, it would be the fifth of its kind, and for no fault of mine! I write as my thoughts lead me, and read it through, once and again. If I find nothing but fire, I burn a lucifer in the flames. and the conflagration over, I religiously avoid all further attempt for the day. Did you not warn me, dearest,

to control my love, and to fill my correspondence with news and comments? You see it is your own teaching! and I am bound to follow it, whatever the consequences.

Do not think me, however, a fit inmate yet for any Asylum! Who knows I may not be, some day, and through your kindness too! Shall I thank you in advance?

To be plain, I couldn't stand the stuff myself, and didn't wish to upset you by sending it—*you* who have serious things to do. And upsetting you may sometimes mean upsetting the poor fellow's fate your hands may be settling.

No more for the present. The odds are against you, three to one,—I never expect you to overtake me!

LETTER IV

MY DEAREST BELOVED,—I feel so happy to receive your loving note. It has removed quite a weight of anxiety from my mind. I was wondering why you didn't write to me after reaching your destination, and my imaginative brain, as you style it, began to make me miserable.

I have no faith in your hopes of getting a re-transfer, so soon. Or perhaps you have thrown me a sop to avoid my lecture on your delay! Anyhow, I give you the benefit of the doubt, as you sometimes do to those you have to deal with!

I am feeling rather weak and depressed this morning. Yesterday, after night-fall, I developed a fever all of a sudden, and without my knowledge, my father or my mother sent for the doctor, and there he was, true to the proverb!—for I was discussing him to myself. You know I have an aversion to these men as a class. There is ever a devouring

look about them, and their thermometer and stethoscope I positively dread. As who will not that hears the story of Dr. Beard and the five sisters, which I learnt first-hand from Bháráti? Our man, however, is by no means so tiresome. At any rate, last night he seemed so fagged after his rounds, I got off with a feel of the pulse and a prescription for four powders. And now you see I am all right! The doctor has deserved his fee and stands three inches taller in father's estimation: but the powders—ah, they are safe in a secret corner of my desk!

Oh fie! that there wise men should presume to prescribe for fevers which defy all thermometers! Indeed, I have been a thermometer myself since your departure, rising and falling every half-hour, and where is the doctor who could decipher me—except *you*?

Beloved, am I treading on the forbidden track? Then let me stop.

LETTER V

'WHAT cannot be cured must be endured.' But why *can't* it be cured, and how indeed *can* it be endured? I think it ought to be the other way—'What cannot be endured *must* be cured.' Dearest, does this sound like a riddle? Then solve it, if you can, but let me tell you it has no reference to your humble servant.

Ranga paid us a visit yesterday afternoon and was here for over two hours. I played the veena for a while and then we fell into conversation, in the course of which she began to dilate on your "cruel kindness". This led me to ask her a question, which, if blunt, served my purpose very well, for it instantly changed the topic.

"Ranga dear," said I, "don't be put out pray, but I so often wished to broach the subject with you and as often my lips failed me. May I know, young as you are why you have chosen to remove your locks, for they

say it was your own choice, and your orthodox parents did not press it upon you and even opposed you?"

I was sorry for my rudeness, for I could observe that tears were about to gather in my friend's eyes. But she quickly withdrew them and answered in her simple, straight way: "Kamala sweet, you know I am innocent of your education. My parents were poor and they couldn't engage a lady to teach me at home, neither did they send me to any of your girls' schools. But let me tell you—and I thank God for the understanding He has given me—if you will not set it down for vanity, let me tell you I can scatter to the winds the reasonings of all your social reformers, the whole host of those hobby riders and dealers as well."

This was indeed a forcible expression of opinion and I did not find it easy to suppress my smile: which however I did with some effort, and probed my friend with a look of interrogation, not unmixed with surprise.

"Men are men," she continued, "and women are women. This is the great truth of nature your wiseacres ignore, but do what they will, they cannot alter it. There be things which men can do and may do but which women cannot and may not."

"You mean that widows may not marry, however young they be?"

"Of course I do, and—between ourselves—I have no admiration for those men and women, who say or act the contrary."

"And for what fault of theirs, Ranga? So many of our sweet lassies are married when they are barely ten years old, and so many more even before they are five or six. And do you mean to say, if mishap should befall the betrothed boy, the poor child must remain a widow for ever, and drag on a dreary existence—in memory of one too, whom she knew not and chose not? Oh, death were better far than such a life!"

"*Chose* not!" exclaimed my friend with emphasis, "and I suppose you will say our girls must grow up and go about hunting for husbands and permit themselves to be wooed and courted with a view to selection! Fine happy pairs indeed the green things will make in their blind love! And if they should blunder in the selection, I fancy you will permit them to dissolve the bond!"

"Certainly," said I, without a moment's hesitation.

"Ah me! that's altogether a new system—the white man's. And Heaven knows how many of *their* couples are truly happy.

Do not judge by appearances. Kamala, all is not gold that glitters. I have heard of white men praising *our* system. They had probably been victims of their own and would fain exchange their *rights* for our *duties*. But white is white and——”

Here she was interrupted by the uncere-
monious entrance into the parlour of that boor
of your acquaintance, who thinks he has
reached the highest heaven because he has
managed to become a limb of the law. With
a roguish twinkle in his eyes, trimming his
diminutive moustache in his characteristic
fashion, he muttered something which we did
not quite catch, but which purported to be
an enquiry about your whereabouts or arrival.
Whom he addressed was not clear, and for
aught I knew, it might have been the walls
or the ceiling, for his look travelled in all
directions. The muttering over, he stood like
a statue, as if he wished us to admire his looks,
of which he entertains no mean opinion !

I bent my head in confusion, for I was
never accustomed to behaviour so rude and
stupid. But Ranga was equal to the occasion,
and I needn't tell you he has been after her,
pretty persistently, these four or five months
that he has been a widower, —let us hope,
with honorable motives.

"There are no servants and no men here, sir," spoke my friend in a bold tone, "and we are unable to give you the information you seek."

Not one word in reply; and baffled, if not humbled,—for some natures cannot feel humiliation—Empty-Ram departed, not however without manipulating his poor moustache for the sixth time in those three minutes!

"A love-seeker!" said I, with a smile, recovering from my confusion.

"A love-seeker forsooth!" retorted my friend. "And well may he go on seeking till the end of his days. He has been doing it at once in four places, and from the *second* week of his poor wife's death,—aging himself younger too, each succeeding month!"

"Indeed!" said I, "that's news and interesting too! Why have you kept it from me all this while? But now he seems to have made his choice, and it is no good——"

"The Lord bless him dear!" interrupted my friend. "Let the fool alone."

"He may waylay his love!"

"And his love may strangle him on the way!"

—which seemed a not improbable event, should the fool pursue his folly which report gives the stamp of vilest villainy.

Then, resuming our interesting topic, I said, "So you say *our* system is the best for us?"

"I do," replied Ranga, "but I don't say it is perfect—nothing is, under the sun. This is a life of imperfections, and 'it is simply idle to picture the ideal and make oneself miserable.'"

She paused for a moment, and I confess I looked not a little puzzled by her philosophy which seemed to have a ring of truth about it.

"I may even say," she continued, "our system is the best from a moral and religious standpoint. For, truly, it is nobler to love whom you marry than to marry whom you love. Our husbands, like our brothers and sisters, come into being in our childhood, and we learn to like them and to love them as we find them. We must accept the choice of our parents even as we accept our birth and our growth, and their follies or mistakes in the one case are not less harmful than in the other. And you know, Kamala, our marriage is not a *contract* but a *sacred rite*—a religious tie indissoluble, the woman becoming one with man for ever."

"For ever!" I uttered in astonishment: "even *after* the death of the husband! Good gracious! Why then, the wife had better go

on the pyre with her lord, as did our women of yore."

"Oh no!" said my friend, "that would be cowardly. The wife has to live and lead a life of suffering and self-denial for the sake of her lord, and discharge sacred duties for the salvation of his soul, until the time comes that she joins him in Heaven. Otherwise, certainly, our ancient custom of going on the pyre with the husband would be ideal—the *sati* which our rulers have prohibited for other reasons."

"And that's why you say our widows may not marry?"

"Yes, if they mean to stick to our religion and claim to remain in our community."

"And it does not strike you, good Ranga, as a heart-rending and humiliating spectacle,—*two million* child-widows in our country, below the age of ten, with the long span of blank life before them!"

"No,—not more heart-rending, nor humiliating either, than the alternative spectacle of perhaps as many grown-up girls and women, in search of husbands,—for who will not wait for a good husband to turn up, if the choice were given—pining away till at last they are obliged to marry old men and live unhappy lives, or die old maids and broken-hearted.

And then, the great danger of unsettled elements in society as against the happiness of peace and contentment, — the result of an ensured and general, though not ideal, settling down—oh, it all depends, Kamala, upon how you look at the thing. As I told you, all is not gold that glit'ers."

I was speechless.

"And in such a big country like ours," she continued, "what is two millions out of, it may be, two hundred millions of women?"

I felt myself non-plussed in every direction, and the truth came home to me that after all education is not everything. Observation and thinking struck me as a surer guide to wisdom than a cartload of books. There was but one point which still troubled my mind, and that was the question with which I drew wise Ranga into this extremely interesting conversation.

"But granting all you say, good Ranga," said I, "why should the poor young widows shave their heads, starve themselves and lead a life no better than living death? Is that any comfort too, to the soul of her lord, or is it a provision of the sages against the temptations of the world? How fairy-like you used to look, Ranga, with your lovely locks! Oh, why indeed did you remove them?"

"Fie! Fie! my girl," reproved my friend, "that's the new-fangled logic of your tongue-sters. Locks and looks have but little to do with the purity of woman's heart. But why should a girl care for locks, when he for whose pleasure they were given is no more, and she has to live a life of duty, for his sake and in his name?"—and here two tears sparkled in her lovely eyes—"Why indeed should a woman care for beauty or for ornament, except for her lord? I would cast all beauty away as I have done my locks and my jewels, but God has cursed me with this form, and it is the cross I have to bear. My life had otherwise been one heap of pleasure—the pleasure of duty and devotion to him whom I never knew but hope in time to see and to know."

She was visibly moved as she spoke those last words, and I wasn't proof either against the emotion they aroused. Indeed, there is something grand about Ranga's ideal of duty and devotion. *Why should a woman care for beauty or for ornament, except for her lord?* Can love and devotion go further?

She stayed but a few minutes longer and left promising to see us again very soon. But she had hardly passed the turning when, to our surprise and regret, we heard

a strange commotion close by—a confused commingling of shrill and harsh sounds, which proceeded as from two familiar voices, and indicated a rather liberal interchange of words and even blows.

And here comes the application of the riddle with which I commenced this rather long letter. Solve it, dearest, in your next, and take what reward you like from your loving one!

LETTER VI

DEAREST, — Here's news for you and welcome news too ! They have settled the match for Chanchal. It is the big man's son. He is to get a dowry of three thousand, and the girl, jewellery worth thrice the amount. The horoscopes, it seems, have agreed beautifully, — as they always do when everything else is agreeable ! The old man is satisfied now that his granddaughter will soon be married. He can die with a peaceful mind ! The wedding comes off in a couple of weeks.

Ranga's philosophy is still ringing in my ears. In itself, it seems to be sound, but all the same I am puzzled by the complicated problem of this compulsory marriage of our girls — at least our Bráhmaṇ¹ girls — before they 'come of age.' It has become a regular bidding, bargaining business. No match has yet been settled for lovely Leela. She is barely eleven, but there is hardly a blessed

¹ *Bráhmaṇs* are the highest caste amongst Hindus.—ED.

household where she is not the subject of talk and comment, and busybodies are ever taunting the father, behind his back, for not yet celebrating her marriage. The poor man, you know, entertains advanced views, and feels unable to link the lot of his beloved daughter with the possible future of any lad; and it seems he was quite put out on Friday last, when some one, in all seriousness, proposed a big official bordering on fifty, with five urchins by the first wife and an abundance of wealth. And so many pity him too, for having, as they are pleased to say, missed 'a very good match'!

Really, why shouldn't they pass an Act that no girl shall be betrothed in marriage before she completes the age of sixteen years, and no girl below twenty shall be married to a man above fifty? I remember you told me sometime ago that it was the policy of our rulers not to interfere in our social and religious matters, but it seems to me they do when they choose. You told me also that such a law could be practically evaded; in fact, that some wise people had attempted the legislation and made a mess of it. I am sure I am not born to comprehend your laws, but something is wrong somewhere and requires a drastic remedy.

I will close here, for if I write a line more, I fear I may fall into my usual fit. I shall not write to you to-morrow. To-morrow of all days—oh, I shall simply feel *wretched* without you!

LETTER VII

MY GUARDIAN ANGEL!—How kind of you to send me the ruby bracelets, with your love—to reach me on the very day too! To care for me so much amidst your work,—to remember my birthday, and to have purchased and taken these with you without ever whispering a word to me!—ah, dearest, would I not thank you with my lips and from my heart, if you were here? Oh, *if you were here!*

My best Beloved, your absence is gnawing at my soul, and your restraint on your “imaginative girl” is even more unbearable. What a relief it would be if this heart could flow on this paper through this pen! But I will strictly obey your behest, lest, giving reins to my steed, I lose you and be lost to you, for ever.

Yesterday’s party was quite a success. All the ladies invited honoured us with their presence, with the single exception of Bháratí,

who is not going to any party since the recent second marriage of her husband. We had some very nice music, particularly from the accomplished daughters of our Registrar—their voices were so heavenly and enchanting. I wished your smoking friend were present, your friend who never thinks much of girls' education and music. I am sure he would have admired the lovely sisters.

We posted a sentry at the outermost entrance to guard against the unwelcome intrusion of any masculine being, for the recent rudeness of Empty-Ram was still fresh in our memory.

By the way, they said your boaster's sister had gone to the Widows' Asylum to get married. It seems the report is utterly untrue!—she was here yesterday with her mother. Poor girl, yet in her teens, it rends one's heart to see her doomed for life, and evil tongues are ever busy about her because she does not keep away from festivities, and her lovely hair which she refused to remove, is an eyesore to the orthodox.

Do you remember, dearest, you ridiculed the idea of Mrs. Dave-Honeysuckle going round the peepul tree, courting its favour? You called it folly and superstition, or perhaps something worse! And now, what will you

say to this?—she has come down here to her sister's, and expects to be confined in a couple of months.

I am still feeling tired and depressed—the effect of last night's thinking and dreaming, all so pleasant yet so very disappointing in the end!

LETTER VIII

WHAT an interesting scene we witnessed this morning at the beach! The sun with his form almost eaten up, grew tame and subdued, and the day assumed the mellow aspect of a moonlight night. It was solemn and awe-inspiring altogether, and the most sceptic mind couldn't fail to be struck with astonishment and admiration.

Tradition, as you know, attributes the eclipse to two serpents, which, for sins committed by the King and the Queen of Light, were ordained by the Creator to periodically punish them with their bites. The Hindu serpents are perhaps, after all, metaphors for your shadows. But it struck me that both explanations were wide of the truth, which, as if by instinct, seemed to flash upon my brain.

Shall I make the revelation? I am afraid you will laugh at me, and conform me as an "imaginative girl". It seems to me that the serpents and the shadows alike, are metaphors.

for the softening, swallowing influence of LOVE! Do not men and women swallow each other with their mutual love? And why not the King of Light his Queen, and the Queen of Light her King, with an ardour induced by the rarity of the conjunction?

My thoughts ran to you, dearest, as they always do when I see anything grand and glorious. I began to reflect how the proudest and most ferocious ruler of men is softened by the influence of woman's absorbing love, for woman is every inch LOVE and nothing else,—a living fountain of purest love, which swallows man, subdues him, and sends him out with a glow of divine spark, which, growing, makes him greater and more supreme.

I was still in such low spirits this morning I quite made up my mind to stay at home with my smoked glass, which I secured only after breaking a whole pane in the operation. But my parents proposed a drive to the seaside, and good people they perhaps thought it would cheer me up. Little did it strike them that the drive might deepen the inner, invisible gloom, under cover of mirth. Was theirs a youthful life, I wonder, which knew no trial,—one smooth stream of silent waters, which swerved neither to the right nor to the left and never split nor separated?

We walked near to the shore into the crowd. The spectacle was imposing in the extreme. The furious waves were dashing ashore with a determination to sweep away the many men and women who ventured and were preparing to venture into their midst, for taking a plunge on the sacred occasion.

From north to south, the crowd was nearly a mile long, but who could tell how many thousands there were, how many of them came to bathe, and how many for sight-seeing? At the far edge, I could discern the stand of a persisting photographer. Scattered here and there were clusters of toys on the tops of poles, their bearers invisible in the throng. Beggars and mendicants there were at every step,—some seated, some strolling, some singing, some sounding the gong. Turning west, I saw two European riders at a distance, slowly trotting their animals side by side,—now halting, now talking, now turning. One of them, I could easily guess, was a lady, and I almost swooned when I contrasted my lonely misery with her supreme bliss. But your legal luminary came to my rescue; for, in the great surprise which his sudden appearance aroused and the inward laughter which his ludicrous disappearance evoked,

every other feeling was drowned. Within about fifty yards of us, I saw Empty-Ram, approaching, and with him was that universal friend and parasite, Mop-jee. But before I could assure myself of their identity, Empty-Ram had caught a side glimpse of my father and turned his back upon us; and notwithstanding the repeated pulls of his cleverer friend, doubled his speed and quickly vanished out of sight!

Who knows there were not a thousand Empties in that motley multitude, even though Empty-Ram might have been the emptiest of them all!

The most remarkable experience I had this morning was the rapid, very rapid transition from one feeling to another. A minute after Empty-Ram's comical departure, I turned my look towards the sea, and I saw a sight at once the loveliest and most pitiable,—an angelic form of sweet sixteen, emerging from the retiring wave, a prisoner in the hands of an old ape on the other side of sixty; whom I should have taken for her grandfather had I not known him and heard of his recent marriage, for the sake of a son to inherit his enormous wealth.

When my vision fell on that lovely image,—timid and shivering, with dishevelled curls

beautiful all the same, her thin white *cheera*¹ wet and heavy clinging 'true to her figure,— I fancied she was a fairy from the sea, and for one moment and only one, I felt sorry I had been born a woman. The next moment I was lost in pity, the deepest ever evoked in my breast, and I cried within myself, "Ranga! O Ranga! where art thou?"

Dearest, I have made my confession! Will you not forgive me my sin, the only one I know I ever committed? Could all the possessions of the world tempt me to wish I had been born any other than I am? Never, oh never!—for then I should be a stranger to you, *you* whom I love only next to yourself!

What penance, my liege, would you impose upon me for my sin? Shall I stand on one leg—like those whom I saw in the sea this morning, getting initiated into the secrets of mystic lore—and repeat your sweet name a million times? Willingly, most willingly would I do this, for yours is the name of our most favourite God—KRISHNA. My lord, my king, oh when shall we meet again!

¹ *Cheera*, *chêla* or *sâdi* is the cloth worn by Hindu ladies. It is generally about a yard and a quarter in width and eight yards in length, and is worn very much like a gown, with beautiful folds, the end being gracefully turned over the shoulder and left as a flowing garment.—EDITOR.

LETTER IX

BELOVED,—I have just received your letter of Wednesday. Your solution is not correct and you have lost your reward! The riddle had no reference to Ranga or her rude pursuer.*

It has now become a stale story, and I feel hardly inclined to bother you with all the details. The commotion was in the house of our neighbours, the Bow-Rows. Mr. Bow-Row swore hard over his tea and threw it at the face of his spouse, but the spirited girl, who couldn't stand the insult, returned it doubly, and called him a barking Bow-Row into the bargain.¹ A blow and a kick, and with a shrill cry

¹ This state of things is of course exceptional and should not leave an erroneous impression on the mind of the reader of the conjugal relations among Hindus. It is somewhat unfortunate that the Letters should contain references to more ill-mated couples than well-mated ones, but it should be remembered that Kamala was from day to day communicating to her husband whatever was interesting and exciting, and the smooth life of happy homes could hardly furnish the pabulum for her pen.—EDITOR.

Mrs. Bow-Row swooned away, for as you know she is in a delicate health.

The incident created quite a sensation in this neighbourhood, and partisans were not wanting on either side. The elders somehow found fault with the poor girl. "Man has a thousand worries," they said, "and when he goes home, tired and troubled, and finds nothing to his taste, he may say or do a rash thing. But the good wife *must* put up with it, and if she retorts and earns a kick or a blow, she has only herself to thank for it."

I couldn't agree with Mother in this view. I told her it was not the first time the rash man exhibited his temper and rewarded love with cruelty. But Mother stuck to her opinion all the same and said what could not be cured must be endured. I was however unable to give up my sympathy for my weak friend, and I thought and still think it ought to be the other way,—What couldn't be endured *must* be cured. There you have the whole thing,—riddle, solution and all!

You say you are coming here for the marriage at the 'Bush.' *Of course!*—only I hope the delight I am already feeling will not end in disappointment.

LETTER X

DEAREST,—You must permit me to-day to write a few foolish things, for I am full of them and cannot feel happy without expression.

Last night I dreamt that you had come, and that I was in your arms! I felt so full of bliss I cried aloud for joy. Indeed, I cried more than any one ever did for the greatest grief!

They say 'extremes meet', but never till now did I realise the full force of the saying. Oh, the happiness of my tears! That extreme joy, like extreme grief, should produce them in such abundance!

Here my imagination steps in, and I ask myself if love and hate can ever live together. Do *these* extremes ever meet? Can you love and yet hate anybody?

I answer in the affirmative. Does not the deepest lake of love sometimes nurture the seed of jealousy and grow the deadly herb

of hate? Drink of the lake, it is Heaven ; taste of the herb, it is Hell. Heaven and Hell in one,—isn't that wonderful?

Beloved, can *I* ever hate you? Can *you* ever hate me? Oh, don't! *don't!* Love me, love me ever! Love me with all my faults. Love me half as much as I love you, and you shall be the most loving man in the world!

Lock me up in a room, bind me hand and foot, but never cease to love me,—I shall love you all the more. Screw me on to your walking stick, so I can always go with you! Convert me into your ring and keep me on your finger for ever!

What trash, indeed, they talk about Mr. and Mrs. Shama! No love is lost between them, they say, because it seems Mr. Shama wouldn't allow his wife to go to her parents even for a week! But Mr. Shama says he cannot live a single day without her, and you know he never steps out but locks her up safely in a room! Isn't that love, to be sure, and the most conclusive proof of the high value he places on his love! They call it jealousy; *I* call it love. Perhaps love and jealousy are one and the same!

Am I getting confused? Then call me a mad girl, but love me as your own,—your very own!

LETTER XI

LOVE again! and love most extraordinary, —love of the dead for the living! It is no other than the sister of Bhárati,—the chubby, girl that became an unfortunate widow last year.

The poor thing is troubled with a devil. They say it is her own husband who died when he was about to commence life with his young wife. He was not allowed to see her and talk to her, and now he is after her with a vengeance. The stupid custom, and the silly talk of society! They mock you if you let the girl-wife and husband meet together, they blame you if you don't!

Empty-Ram here too!—Empty-Ram of whom there seems to be no end. You hear of the vile wretch wherever there is a young widow, or a girl to be married. Repulsed by Ranga, he confined his courtship nearer home and the devil began from that day. The world seems to be moving on but one wheel!

Poor Chubbie! she is obliged to be all alone with her exorciser at dead of night, in a lonely room, or under the tree in the back-yard. It seems she likes it!—the devil is pacified and kept under control, at least for a time. Exorciser after exorciser, I know not how many there were in these few days!

The devil, they say, is the mother's doing! Why should she allow the young widow to keep her hair and do it up neatly too every day? Why should she allow her to wear nice clothes and jewels, to eat good food and grow up a bonny girl who may tempt both living and dead devils? Where is the end to criticism? And the most prominent critic,—who could it be but the good lady Mrs. Dave-Honeysuckle who has perhaps forgotten her past, when she had her own devils and suspicious devils too, as was whispered at the time? The pot calling the kettle black!—that is the world.

My sympathies are with the unfortunate mother. What greater pain to a mother than the miserable lot of her daughters? Sadness at home, shame and scandal abroad,—she feels quite humbled. But she is a bold lady,—she hasn't sent Bhárati back to her husband since the fool married a second wife as if the first wasn't one too many for him.

Have I told you the reason for this extraordinary marriage which has puzzled everybody? It is no more a secret. Her parents sacrificed sweet Bháratí in her seventh year to Mammon, and Mammon's mother—freed from her husband's control—has got the idiot remarried to an ugly hobgoblin of eleven, her own brother's daughter, to keep the wealth in her own family! The cunning old widow has thus baffled the selfish calculations of Bháratí's parents and kinsmen. It reminds one of the story of the boys and the frogs—frolic and game to the actors, but death to the objects of the game! Two human sacrifices at the altar of Mammon!—who will not shed a tear for lovely Bháratí?

It is her fate, they say,—inevitable Fate, the last resort of Hindu philosophy, the consolation for crimes. To do a thing in coolest deliberation and to lay it at the door of Fate! But the worst irony of Fate for Bháratí is, it seems she could be compelled by law to live with her husband, to slave to him and his good mother, and sent to gaol for refusal!

To *gaol!* Oh, where are your legislators, your Honourables who pass sleepless nights and spend enormous sums,—who employ agents, canvassers and go-betweens to beg and cringe for votes, and themselves trouble

the voters with appeals, entreaties, recommendations, telegrams and what not — from friends, friends of friends, and friends of friends' friends! Is it all a mere farce, the election, and are they all mere title-seekers and time-servers? How can I believe it, for I know some who are honourable without the title?

Bhárati is nothing if she is not the daughter of her mother. She has stoutly refused to go back to her husband, whatever the consequences; and it is said three lawyers—one of them of note—have espoused her cause and promised to work for her, without fees, when occasion arises. I could understand briefless men like Empty-Ram begging for work without fee, but it puzzled me to think how the big man came into it, for big guns must always have fees and big fees too! It seems he has been moved by the purest of motives and is in full sympathy with the sweet creature. Poor thing! what sin did she commit in her past life, to have become, in the very bloom of youth and beauty, a nameless, frameless picture without a nail to hang on!

May all good men befriend poor Bhárati and all women think and talk well of her! And may the Almighty protect her and bring her safe from all trials and troubles!

LETTER XII

HORRIBLE news ! I can scarcely hold my pen. Mrs. Raz-Heartless is no more,—the strong lady who was seen hale and healthy yesterday evening ! We could hardly believe it when we learnt the news at seven this morning. And every earthly vestige of her existence had disappeared by that time !—the cremation was over.

Oh the surprise ! and the surmises and rumours,—the air was full of them ! Two alone have survived,—the popular belief and the account of the relatives and the doctor, the latter being confirmed by the inquiry of the Police. They say that she died from a sudden acute pain in the heart, but everybody believes that she drowned herself in the big garden well. She was a thorn in the way of her husband's sister,—the wicked lady who never ceased to poison her brother's mind with the vilest of reports against the good wife ; and he always beat the poor thing

black and blue, but last night so brutally, it seems, that she was actually tired of life!

I cannot write more to-night. My head reels to think of the cruelty, and my hand trembles. My friend seems to pass before my vision. Good Gowri! whither art thou gone, and wilt thou never return!

Is there any Power above that can know the truth and punish the crimes of sinners? There seems to be none on earth. Here, for a certainty, Money is power, the most omnipotent!

LETTER XIII

FROM sorrow to sport seems but a span. There has scarcely been time enough for yesterday's shock to subside, but already everybody is indulging in mockery of to-day's event. How one day drowns another!

Empty-Ram married at last!—Empty-Ram who has been sparing no pains to select a wife from virgins and even widows of his caste, for he delighted in the harmless profession of being a bit of a social reformer. Under the honourable pretext which his widowhood furnished him, he approached many a respectable family; but everywhere he acquitted himself most dishonourably, though more as an empty, conceited simpleton than as a finished villain of Mop-jee's type.

Empty-Ram had laid down extraordinary if not impossible qualifications as the *sine qua non* of his would-be bride. And why should he not?—a budding lawyer with a bright prospect before him, a judge in embryo,

and at no distant date whilst enjoyment was still in him, a retired gentleman with a fortune ! He wasn't wanting in good looks, at least in his own estimate, and had announced himself younger than his years, and everybody seemed to believe him ! And who would hunt up old records and dates which would compromise him by proving that he must have commenced his alphabet before he was born ?

What damsel in the realm would be too good for such a pink of perfection ? Would it be too much to insist that she must be smart and intelligent, musical and mathematical, fair and accomplished, of good birth and breeding, rich into the bargain, the nose neither too long nor too short, and eyes like those of his late wife ?—altogether superior to her who loved him so much, he couldn't help singing her praises before everybody as the best tribute he could pay to her memory !

Everyone was tired of Empty-Ram's catalogue, which had been circulated in his own hand both here and outside, and friends whom he had requested to help him in his search as well as relatives whom he had commissioned to send up their nominations, felt disgusted with their work,—some of them disappointed and even offended. It was therefore no less a matter for surprise and

curiosity than one of doubt and disbelief, when it was announced last week that Empty-Ram had made his selection and the wedding would come off immediately.

It did come off this morning,—a four hours' affair, out of respect to his departed wife! No invitations had been issued. There was no procession and neither fuss nor festivity, though the girl's grandmother, it is said, grumbled and hinted that it was no second marriage for *her* child.

A feeling of relief has found a welcome entrance into everybody's mind; but curiosity has been on the wing and comments in no complimentary manner on this love at first sight of a girl of eleven summers. Empty-Ram's choice, it seems, was determined by the girl's quickness at figures; for he had proposed to her a series in simple addition, in working which she committed the same blunder as himself! It makes one reflect that

•
"A mastiff dog

May love a puppy cur for no more reason

Than that the twain have been tied up together."

May Heaven bless the innocent girl with a happy future and develop in her the power to make up for the emptiness of Empty-Ram!

LETTER XIV

THEY have commenced the funeral ceremonies. Mr. Raz, too proud to bend his back, is doing them by proxy,—the arrangement being at once both convenient and commendable, for it is interpreted as an indication of intense grief.

A strange, very strange report comes to ear,—strange but true. This morning, the crows wouldn't touch or approach the food that was offered them at the close of the ceremonies. No ! not until the proud husband, in the presence of all assembled, cast off his dignity and stood with folded hands, and mentally addressing the spirit of his departed wife, promised to carry out her wishes—which were of course known to him—and to see that her dear son was brought up and cared for with the same affection as he would be if she were alive, and never suffered from any step-motherly influence.

The promise given, the crows at once rushed to the food in a body, and in a couple of minutes ate up every morsel of it, to the amazement of all present! The godless husband was seen to quake with fear!

How wonderful to think that the spirit of good Gowri hovered over the food and kept the crows from approaching, until the fulfilment of her wishes was promised! How rashly—and it seems to me thoughtlessly—some of our so-called educated men and reformers pooh-pooh our religious beliefs and ceremonies! Oh, the danger of little knowledge!

Presumptuous Man! stoop in shame at these small but significant indications of the supernatural in our lives! Sink your supposed superiority before the common crow, which, with its tiny orbs of vision, could see what *you* cannot with your larger ones,—the crow which, inferior as it seems, soars on wings of liberty into the pure atmosphere above, showing what superior man cannot do! You have a brain, it is true;* but you think not, or think only under the blinding influence of presumptions. Do not call them fools and madmen, who believe in a world outside your weights and your wires,—there are more secrets in Creation than your little brain can grasp or your poor powers can penetrate!

Dearest, I have lost myself in reflection. I couldn't help it. My mind is full of Gowri,— noble Gowri who, having passed away before her time from her earthly abode, thinks not of herself or what she has lost, harbours not vengeance against any one, but finds her highest bliss and contentment in safeguarding and securing the happiness of her dear child ! Gowri, my friend, accept these tears which wet the space below, —tears, the only language in which your loving friends can now speak to you !

LETTER XV

OH the hardness of some hearts ! and the shame of it ! Barely four days have elapsed and they have already settled the girl and the date ! Funeral ceremonies in the morning, marriage negotiations in the evening !—one would almost deem it sinful to utter the two in the same breath. But they have quietly worked them together,—rather, they have concluded the negotiations whilst the ceremonies have yet to run on for eight days !

The elders have managed it all, and quite promptly too, because of the high religious value of immediately filling the gap which has occurred ! The religious value of such unfeeling precipitancy,—oh, it passes my comprehension altogether !

The marriage is fixed for Sunday week, the fourteenth day of poor Gowri's disappearance from this world. The girl—an orphan of ten—is a granddaughter of

Mr. Dave-Honeysuckle by his first wife, and
she is to be left at once with her husband —
to do little services to him and fill the gap!

LETTER XVI

NOT getting any letter from you all this week, I have just taken out your last from my desk and read it through once and again.

I am indeed feeling quite delighted with the charming account you have given of your landlord's youthful daughters, the twin fairies "so fascinating, so civilised, so well accomplished." Why do you wish, dearest, that *I* could see them and hear them play the lute? Rather wish it of the stupid old mother-in-law who wouldn't permit poor Sárada to sing and had the heart to break her veena to pieces! She might repent her folly and learn to be kinder and more humane.

Really, dearest, I feel so happy you are not miserable like me—nothing please me so much as *your* pleasure. My hearty thanks to your fairy friends who, I am glad, will entertain you with their music better than I can from this distance. I have made up my mind not to touch my veena until you come!

LETTER XVII

DEAREST,—Something seems to trouble me—something which has no name and perhaps no existence. It is the bane of my life, my imagination, and I fear some day it will make me a brainsick Bedlamite.

My bewitcher, do not blame me. I bury my doubts in oblivion, look into the gay world and force myself to be cheerful; but soon the cloud covers my mind and I lose my balance!

Each day brings its fresh revelations, which convince me that a good many look upon our union with dislike, and talk of it in a spirit of scorn. I am surprised and shocked to learn that your Ganga—your own Ganga whose consent you had obtained—is blaming you before everybody for having bound yourself to a “butterfly of base breed”! Dear me, the uncharitable world! How few, indeed, whose envy does not end in evil talk, and how *very* few, not happy themselves, who can wish others happiness!

My lord, I am daily bitten by these taunts, but the bitterest of them do not pain me whilst I have that balm of balms—your love which I prize above everything. Your love, Beloved, your love—I long for nothing else!

Ah! there comes Ranga, welcome Ranga. Let me close this letter and drink a little of her philosophy, and soothe my troubled soul.

LETTER XVIII

DEAREST AND BEST BELOVED, — Ranga's visit yesterday afternoon was most lucky and opportune, for I was feeling cheerless and might have gone deep into gloom but for her interesting and diverting discourse.

"What ails you, Kamala, and why that glum countenance?" asked my penetrating friend.

"Nothing!" said I, forcing a smile from my lips, "nothing but the world."

"Cheer up! sensitive soul," rebuked wise Ranga, "cheer up! the world is as much full of gleam as gloom."

The remark had its effect upon me, and in a few minutes we entered into a chat upon the events of the week.

"I never could reconcile myself" said I, "to the heartlessness of a second marriage within two weeks of the sad termination of the first. And the *religious* value attached to the act! — Oh, dear! is our religion a heartless,

unfeeling monster which sanctions such barbarities?"

"Tut, tut! Kamala," interposed my friend, "the rationale of our religious injunctions is neither simple nor superficial, and there must necessarily be things which one cannot understand without the aid of deep learning. But why go to religion? Isn't there enough in the experience of the world to justify the course which so puzzles you, heartless as it may seem?"

I looked bewildered in the extreme. "Where is the heart, Kamala, in the man who has lost his loving wife?" resumed my friend. "It is gone!—broken to bits, which must be patched up together as best they can be. It has fallen into the flames of grief, which, left to grow, will burn it to ashes. The man is no better than a patient whom the most dangerous disease has placed on the verge of death, deprived of all power to think and act for himself. Must he not leave his treatment to his friends, and swallow, however unwillingly, the most repulsive potion that may be administered to save him?"

The illustration struck me into a submissive attitude and I gazed a vacant look at ~~my~~ expounder.

"And where is the good, my friend," she continued, "in the slow treatment of nursing

a grief, allowing it to gnaw and bite and eat into the very vitality of the sufferer, and *then* attempting to mend it? It may be poetry, but poetry is not always wholesome in this rough and rugged life. It is a question of cremation or burial. The one is interesting but profitless poetry, the other is prosaic but practical philosophy. And my good Kamala, life is so wonderful, so adjustable, that experience has proved the wisdom of cremation as much in the case of a dead and decaying frame as in that of a living and growing grief — experience which is indeed hard for strangers to understand."

I was simply dumb-stricken, but after a moment's pause, I ventured to open my lips and said, "And with tears in the eyes and trouble in the heart, one must go through an affair of love!"

"There! there! my friend," answered Ranga, "you forget that our marriage is not the result of love sought, selected and pre-existing, but a ceremony which merely fixes the quarter in which love divine, for divine purposes, has to be cultivated by submission, not by choice; a ceremony arranged by the elders, in which neither the child-bride nor the bridegroom partakes with any prick of Cupid's dart. Otherwise, under a system

of courtship, the second marriage which has so perplexed you would be an inhuman proceeding—a marriage in the churchyard.”

We passed on to other matters and I happened to tell my friend how, on the eclipse day, I had been shocked by the sight of the sweet beauty of sixteen sacrificed to the rich old man of sixty.

“Mammon’s mischief, my dear,” said she, “is not confined to one country or clime, nor to one system. He has as often perverted the voluntary choice of the parties as he has profaned the sacred trust of the parents. Many a time have I shed a tear for lovely Bhārati. These are the hard cases which make bad law, but on *their* account the law cannot be dispensed with. There is no system in the world which cannot lead to abuse.”

“But, by the bye, Ranga,” I asked, “do our sacred books really allow a man to marry more wives than one?”

“It seems they do,” replied my friend, “but for very special reasons and under very special circumstances, such as infidelity, incapacity, barrenness and the like. But most instances which come to our notice are abuses of the special and extraordinary privilege, being the outcome of bestial lust. A big lord who marries a batch of wives is no better

than a beast, and ever remains a stranger to the noble passion which elevates man and brings him nearer God."

"Why, I have heard of men in the North," said I, "and Bráhmans too, marrying many wives but never living with most of them. Where is the lust in such cases? It was said that one or two had married as many as a hundred girls, and possibly kept a directory to remember their names!"

"A ludicrous thing" remarked my friend, "which excites a smile when really it ought to draw a tear. Those are rare and extraordinary instances of extreme sectarian conservatism, and the most bigoted will not defend them."

Then we talked for a while about poor Gowri and her funeral ceremonies. This led me to a question which I thought my friend would fail to answer.

"My wise Ranga," I asked, "how do you explain funeral ceremonies for the living, for I have heard of their being performed for one who had married a widow, and also for another who had embraced Christianity?"

"Our sacred books" explained my friend, "look upon an outcast as a dead man, that is, dead so far as his community is concerned. But our priests have made it literal and

enjoined the funeral ceremonies,—another instance of blind bigotry! Of course, the ceremonies are a farce and cannot possibly carry any virtue with them.”

“A farce! I should say an insult.”

“Well—an insult without an intention.”

I smiled at the ready wit of my friend. Indeed, I always admired Ranga for her wisdom, and I now asked her how she managed to acquire such a fund of valuable information without much reading. She disclaimed my compliment and explained that the little she knew was what she gathered from the conversations and discussions, to which she used to listen, of her old grandfather, with great men learned in the sacred lore.

“What a blessing” said I, “to have a purely orthodox home! My father—all deference to his learning and position—is a cosmopolitan, and I have been brought up in a style which I am ceasing to admire, much as I love my parents and feel grateful to them for their kindness and affection. I have read and read until I have spoiled my eyes; but where is the good of reading, and reading books too, written by half-informed reformers? It seems to me many of our English-educated men, with their ill-digested

Western notions and their superficial knowledge of our social conditions, are neither fish, nor flesh, nor good red herring. Their proposals and programmes of reform have often looked absurd even to me who ought to appreciate them."

"Of course," interposed my friend, "there is much in our social rules and practices which requires and is capable of reformation, though not in the manner and to the extent our reformers suggest and advocate: but it must not be forgotten, much too, which, intolerable and unreasonable as it may appear to a few, can-*not* be altered without interfering with the very character of our social fabric and without shaking the foundations on which it rests and has rested through many long centuries. Forms and restrictions, in one shape or another, exist and must exist in every society, and in the long run they serve its best interests, whatever the hardship they may work on individuals who have changed under the influence of a new leaven. A fabric, huge, strong and magnificent, may be, and occasionally must be, plastered and painted, but it can never be placed on new foundations; neither can it be altered in its essential shape or structure, without actual demolition, which a handful of individuals

can never accomplish. Those, if they are so dissatisfied with the old building that they cannot live in it contenting themselves with new plaster and new paint, must perforce seek a site outside—solitary though it be—and raise their ideal fabric if they can. If their attempt proves futile or their fabric falls to the ground after a short life, it will be a lesson, an invaluable lesson, to posterity.”

“Very true,” said I, “and I know of no commoner fad of our hybrid products of English education than their twaddle about the cruelty of Caste.”

“Yet, the barest observation and thinking” added my friend, “will reveal that caste exists everywhere in the world and is a necessary element in every large society, though perhaps it may be caste here and class or rank elsewhere, and may be changeable there but not here. But immutability, based on considerations of original worth which have their own value, is an essential characteristic of the Hindu arrangement and cannot be changed without destroying the fabric itself. It is indeed funny to notice the mighty power of caste asserting itself every day even in the life of those who, to all profession, have given it up. Hindu converts to Christianity but seldom forget considerations of caste

in matters of marriage and on occasions of dinner and the like; the higher being ever reluctant to freely mix and fuse with the lower, the lower ever anxious to reduce all to a level and to destroy all cognizable marks of the original distinction. Caste-marks on the forehead and caste-terminations in names, some or all may give up; yet, it will take centuries for even the convert's caste to be killed. And it is a mistake to think it is confined to one or two corners of his corporal existence, while in reality it creeps through every fibre and fibril of his life."

"One would think" I put it in, "that instead of dropping caste-terminations altogether and crippling their names, it would serve their purpose very much better if they adopted a common high-caste title."

"Indeed, ingenious Kamala," said my good friend laughing, "indeed, your suggestion would lead to a confusion of castes, promoting all to the highest. I wish our Christian friends could get the hint and convert themselves into *Sāstris* or *Sarmas* or *Iyers* or *Iyengars* or *Rowjis*." ¹

"For that matter," said I, "our Hindu friends who spout so much about the injustice

¹ These are caste - titles of different sects of Bráhmans in Southern India. — EDITOR.

of caste may as well follow the hint, for then it would soon become impossible to say, of a *Sástri* for instance, whether he was by birth a real Bráhman, or only a non-Bráhman who has assumed the title,—a Kshatriya, a Chetty, a Naidu, a Mudaliyar, a Pillai or a Pariah.”¹

My friend was lost in laughter. Just then, we were attracted by the loud sing-song appeals of a feminine voice which proceeded from the outermost entrance of our house, and from sheer curiosity we betook ourselves to the place, and saw a professional young beggar with a babe she carried in a cradle made of her cloth. We felt amply rewarded for our pains, for a lovelier babe it is hard to imagine. The little thing, which was duly exhibited to us, looked so angelic that I was almost tempted to take it into my arms and kiss it to my heart's content. That cherub face, the dark lovely curls, those beaming eyes, the little rosy lips, the tiny hands and feet,—altogether a model of chaste beauty, an image of purest gold—it was impossible to think it as the child of the mother who carried it. I scanned the woman again and again, and so did my friend. Dark and ugly, she was quite a contrast to the little angel

¹ These are different castes and sub-castes amongst Hindus. — EDITOR.

and certainly didn't look the mother of a three-months' babe.

"The hard world we live in!" I uttered at length with a sigh.

"Which must be, my dear, in every system of society," remarked my friend.

My heart melted with pity for the poor thing which luck had spared and transferred to the wandering beggar. I went in, leaving my friend the monopoly of that sweet sight, and brought a cloth, a rag of an old shawl and a new petticoat I had recently stitched for myself and found too loose. I gave them to the woman and felt so pleased with thinking they would serve to make the babe comfortable. My friend had already given her a four-anna bit. I dropped another into her hand and the woman departed.

"What think you, Ranga," I asked, "of the professional begging which prevails in our country? They say so much against indiscriminate charity to those who can work for their living."

"Another of the fads," replied Ranga with her usual readiness, "so commonly indulged in, as if there were work enough for all the huge millions who inhabit our huge country! Stop begging, and crime or misery must increase *enormously*. The beggars must turn

thieves and robbers or sink into the most abject, unspeakable misery, such as they say is found in the country of the white men, side by side with the most dazzling wealth and opulence. Thank God, poor as our country has become, we do not find such horrible contrasts in the conditions of the people. Our charity has saved us from a plight which cries shame on humanity—charity which teaching unselfishness helps man to rise to a higher plane nearer to the divine; charity which beginning at home has manifested itself in our Joint Family, the pride of our Hindu social fabric. The mutual affection and love which bind the members together, and the sacrifice and adjustment of each to suit and promote the happiness of the rest, are things unknown to systems in which self prevails and seeks independence and separation."

"How much we hear, dear Ranga," said I, "against our Joint Family and about the parasites who feed on the earning member! You have no doubt heard of that monster proposal of some of our learned people to secure a sole and selfish right in the earnings of education. It was lucky the proposal fell through when everybody was thinking it was passed."

"A short-sighted and suicidal proposal at the best!" remarked my friend. "The selfish father who wishes to secure himself from his brothers would abhor the idea of his rich son neglecting a poor helpless brother in whom education had not borne fruit. Indeed, Kamala, our Joint Family, growing from the seed of affection and love, is a tree of eternal growth extending on all sides in the family. There is no killing it, though you may and must lop off its branches when they cross and obstruct each other. But each branch is bound to grow into a tree with new branches of its own."

"But don't you think, my good Ranga," I asked, "our Joint Family has unduly lowered the position of woman in our household?"

"It is not the system that has done it," replied my wise friend, "but the improper expansion of the respect enjoined on young ladies in their conduct towards the elders of the family. It is the darkest crust which at present disfigures our social fabric and requires to be removed and replaced by new plaster and paint."

"I dare say the ignorant condition of our women"—I observed, with some hesitation—"is responsible for it in a great measure. I think our women can be elevated only by

a system of sound and substantial education, unlike the superficial smattering imparted in the schools."

"Ah, well!" replied my friend with a nod, "but you mustn't fancy that the education which comes of learning to read and to write is what will save *all* our women. But few, very few of the many millions of this land could aspire to such education,—perhaps not one in ten thousand,—especially in these days when our country is poor and famished; and even in the glorious past, you mustn't imagine there were very many who were educated in that way. For the large, very large majority, the education imparted in their homes which relates to the daily duties of their humble lives, is all that is possible and practicable; though no endeavour should be spared to increase the number of those—very small as it must ever be—who, from their better station and situation, could acquire higher culture and adorn and illumine our society like shining stars of varying magnitude. And this is true of men as of women, and true of every social fabric on the globe. It is the beautiful order of Nature and the Universe."

"And what do you think, my friend," I inquired, "of the great barrier which exists

between the sexes in our society, in the matter of free social intercourse? Would it not enhance the happiness of existence and conduce to the progress of society, if men and women could freely mix together as they do in the country of our rulers?"

"That is yet another fundamental of our social fabric," replied my friend, "which cannot be altered, though its ugly outcrust and outgrowth may be and must be removed. Every social system, Kamala, esteeming woman as its best and most precious ornament, has placed the highest value on her purity and, to ensure it, defined the limits of social freedom and intercourse which may safely exist between the sexes. These limits differ indeed very widely in different systems, as they do in ours and the white man's, and it is impossible to say that one definition has been, *on the whole*, more successful or less effectual than another. It is a mad and impossible idea to introduce the white man's definition in our society as it would be for the white man to adopt ours into his. Individuals may of course attempt it and feel thankful if they escape the dangers which are generally inevitable."

"You think then our *gosha* must exist!" said I, with some astonishment: "the cursed

seclusion which is making brutes of women by confining them to the inner apartments of our habitations and depriving them of God's light and air."

"Nonsense, Kamala, nonsense!" rebuked my friend. "Where have you got *gosha* in our Hindu society, except perhaps in a corner or two where wealth has assumed despotic sway, or where your new products of English education, rising in rank and position, have, under false notions of respect, taken to it in a way? Go amidst the rural populace and see the freedom with which women, young and old, move about and attend to their duties. Even in the town, observe the women of ordinary families. It is your rank and riches and respect which have imposed obnoxious restrictions and exposed the principle of our system to unmerited slur and criticism."

It was near five, and Ranga rose to depart. I had no mind to let her go, though we had been chatting so long and on so many topics. She said she was soon starting on a pilgrimage to holy places but promised to call here before she set out on her long tour. She then left with slow and unwilling steps.

My dearest one, have I tired your patience with this long letter? I hope not, and you

wrote to me that the last discourse of Ranga interested you so much. Besides, this writing has done me good. I have forgotten all my gloomy thoughts and now think of nothing but your love,—your love, Beloved, and a line from your loving heart. Are you too busy? Or are you——ah! I will not say it.

LETTER XIX

DISAPPOINTED even to-day! and to-morrow of course not your letter but yoursef I expect for the marriage which begins the day after at the 'Bush.'

You will probably have started before this can reach you, yet I will take my chance; and who knows after all something might not turn up to keep you from coming—to deprive me of the bliss I am already counting as mine? Of late, my star has been against me, and the worst luck cannot take me by surprise.

Our separation has furnished a handle to those who had sought my hand before you dawned upon me, and idle-talkers are not wanting who attribute it to a breach! A breach between us, dearest!—ah, will it ever be!

LETTER XX

YOUR letter at last!—a disappointment yet a delight. My star has not failed to work its mischief. My fear has come true! Ah! will all my fears come true? I tremble at the thought—it will drive me mad!

So after all you cannot come for the marriage,—not even for a single day? Such a great pity! The old man who loves you as his son will miss you, and so your Ganga who will of course be present at the wedding. Ganga, whose mockery you say I shouldn't heed, will chaff me without end, puppet as you think her to be. I have indeed no mind to go to the wedding—without you—except that you press me and I cannot displease you.

Dearest, you have made up for your long silence by your loving note, so full of tender words. You say my letters interest you so very much, you preserve them and delight in reviewing their contents now and again! "Your description of the eclipse is indeed

poetical and I feel proud of my poetical partner. The hit on our Honourables is well-merited and the account of Empty-Ram's marriage is as true as humorous. Ranga's discourse has turned my thoughts into a new channel. Above all, your compliments to my fairy friends pleased me best and I love you the more for your generosity!"—Ah, Beloved, how by a few sweet words you flatter me into peace and joy!

Then again,—you say I was a tempting apple on the topmost branch and you reached me with the ladder of your love! and the cruel separation has come whilst you were considering yourself the happiest of mortals and you are actually dying for me every minute! Dearest, how could I live without pinning you at once to my heart? Can you know how much I hunger for your company, how much I thirst for your love? Oh, when will you satisfy this hunger and this thirst and save this sinking soul!

Own Beloved, I have made for you a garland of amaranths picked from our small garden. Wear it, in my name, and see if it will make your pain at all endurable.

Adieu, dearest, adieu!—until I return from the wedding. Let your heart remain all my own!

LETTER XXI

A SURFEIT of a good thing! I have had it, dearest, day and night, at the 'Bush', and feel quite done up and exhausted with the strain. And for five days together!—Ha, the relief of my return to our quiet home! But I am not yet equal to the task of writing you a long letter, giving the news of the marriage you would so much like to learn from my pen. I must do it by instalments.

It was indeed only with a sluggish heart I went to the wedding. But once there, I was soon lost in the bustle and excitement, and helped myself to a good bit of enjoyment—as good a bit as I could have shared without you with others: neither did I mind the carping or cross looks of your good Ganga who has honoured me with a new title—"a meddlesome man-woman."

A meddlesome man-woman! Perhaps, dearest, I *am* a 'man-woman,' if it means that, within limits, I move as freely with men

as with women. I have been brought up like it or I shouldn't have become yours, nor feel sorry either that I am not a prude like some who were present at the wedding. But I don't know that I ever was ‘meddlesome’ anywhere. Certainly not at the ‘Bush’.

If I plaited the hair of the bride or prevented her being dressed up like a doll, it was because all the ladies begged me to attend to her toilet. If I accompanied the girl hither and thither in the ceremonials and bestowed maternal care upon her, it was because of the paternal affection which, I know, Chanchal commands in your heart. If I attended to the lady-guests who were departing and satisfied myself that they had been honoured with *chandan*¹ and flowers and *támbool*², or if I treated them again to a parting sprinkle of rose-water, it was in compliance with the special request of the bride's father—who I know is to you more than a brother—that I should, for your sake, cast aside all

¹ *Chandan* is sandal-wood ground on stone and made into a fine liquid paste with rose-water and cooling spices. It is offered to guests as a mark of respect and is smeared over the hands and sometimes also over portions of the body.—EDITOR.

² *Támbool* or *pán supári*, offered to guests as a mark of respect, consists of betel leaves and areca-nut together with spices, such as cloves, cardamoms and mace. — EDITOR.

formality and act as a willing helpmate to his weak, sickly wife.' And what care I for anyone's comment, so long as I know I have *your* approbation and am not 'meddlesome' *in your* eyes. But it does look, Beloved, an ill reward for one's trouble, if after all one does, for purest love, one is called 'meddlesome' by a muddle-headed muckworm.

Pray, do not be alarmed, dearest, at this temper. I have poured it out on this paper and am done with Ganga. At the wedding, I need hardly say, I passed for a most amiable and adjustable person. And that's my real self—as you know!

LETTER XXII

DEAREST,—There is so much I would like to write about the marriage, I don't know where and how to begin. I am confounded by the abundance of my stock and the hurly-burly creeps through me when I call to mind the 'Bush' and its five-days' festivities.

It is indeed strange how one is stifled and suffocated by a glut of good things. That is the poverty of all earthly possessions. Light enables you to see: in excess, it is the enemy of your vision. Riches are as often the mother of meanness and misery as the means of enjoyment and elevation. Even the gentle rain from above sweeps away man and man's all, in torrents. There is but *one* thing of which there can be no excess, no plethora, no destructive deluge. It is LOVE—which, though of the earth, is not earthly but divine.

Beloved, can we ever love each other to satiety? *Impossible!* Love grows on self and lives through eternity. It is the gulf

which spreads with filling—the spring which feeds with giving—the stream which swells with running! Love true is divine, and knows no end and — no beginning.

When did our loves begin to germinate? I know not; neither do you: though both of us know the period when we felt that love *had* begun life in our hearts. The beginning is a mystery in love as in all life. It is the magic of Creation—the evolution out of Nothing. Life, with its ups and downs, has an end: but love, the spirit of life, lives on for ever!

My own, can you recollect and relate one wee bit of our wedding ceremony? *I* cannot. Nor do I feel sorry that love has swallowed a whole mouthful of my life. The marriage at the 'Bush' has filled me with a most abnormal wish—that, wedded as we are, we should once more go through the sacred ceremonial—of course a foolish, puerile fancy, for it can never be!

But the ceremonial itself—Ah! how solemn, how sacred, how touching and how replete with earnest meaning! Never before did its beauty strike me so forcibly as it did at Chanchal's wedding! ¹

¹ This apparently accounts for the somewhat lengthy though highly interesting description given of the marriage ceremony in the subsequent letters.—EDITOR.

LETTER XXIII

It was eight on Wednesday morning when we arrived at the 'Bush'. I feared our Blackie would shy at the gate, at the sight of the crowd and the confusion and noise which prevailed; and I felt so thankful when he walked quietly in and took us right under the porch. A large number of gentlemen and respectable-looking young men occupied the verandah and almost blocked the entrance. But immediately after our carriage stopped, the way was clear, and I went straight in towards the ladies' quarter, without casting another glance at the caps and turbans on either side. The host—your namesake—met me near the entrance. He welcomed me with a smile and followed me in and began to blame me for not arriving a day earlier to help them in their arrangements. He then took me here and there to show me my duties, which, he said, he expected me to do with a willing heart;

and we had at the north-eastern curve a ten minutes' low chat and 'discussion' during the early part of which his wife, the hostess, was present.

The finger of scorn had already moved, for amidst the bevy of ladies on the western side, I observed Ganga pointing to me and treating them to repeated peals of laughter. * What business has a strange lady, rich and educated though she be, who was no sister or cousin or near relation, to rub shoulders with a gentleman of position—whatever his intimacy with her father or husband—and to interest herself in his affairs, so much and so openly? * As well may she marry him. * The wonder how his wife allows it! * But what could she do, poor lady, so weak and sickly too? * Proud creature to come here in that simple *cheera* with so little lace, when everybody else wears the best brilliant dress! * And to wear so few ornaments as if her beauty were all-sufficient and would be marred! * Mercy, she doesn't call us donkeys with a golden harness! * * What uncharitable criticism! she is so good and simple, and so affable. * Ah! that's her art which wins her golden opinions everywhere and seals your lips in her presence. * * * These idle, unmeaning whispers had already

grown too familiar to my ear to upset or unsettle me in that most momentous hour.

The bridegroom's party were lodged in the 'Avenue' close by. The bride's parents had already gone there with their relations, friends and priests, and formally proposed the marriage already agreed upon, of course after the usual presentation of clothes to the bridegroom and his parents and the citation of the *gótra*¹ and ancestors of both sides. The bridegroom's parents had returned the visit and accepted the proposal after duly honouring the bride's parents with clothes, and the bride with a *cheera* and petticoat, a jewel and the wedding ring; nor had they omitted the citation of the *gótra* and ancestors. The invitation intimating the hour fixed for the happy event had subsequently gone forth to the 'Avenue' and the bridegroom and party were expected to arrive.

It was already nine o' clock. The sun was shining bright and promised to keep the sky

¹ *Gótra* is the name of the remotest ancestor to whose stock the family claims to belong. According to the sacred books of Hindus, the bride and the bridegroom must not be of the same *gótra*, i. e., they must not be descended from the same original ancestor; and it seems the marriage, even through mistake, of two persons of the same *gótra* is not only null and void for conjugal and religious purposes, but the girl cannot be married by another and must be maintained by her attempted husband.—EDITOR.

clear and cloudless for sweet Chanchal's wedding. The auspicious time was fixed between eleven and twelve, but there was much to be done and messenger after messenger was despatched to start the bridegroom's procession.

At last it did start, and at a quarter to ten, in an open barouche drawn by a pair of stately Arabs who had their own share of ornamentation, arrived the bridegroom—I need hardly say, amidst the loud beat of drums and the deafening music of long pipes. He was escorted by two little gentlemen on the left and four in front, all the six apparently rejoicing as much in the splendour of their dresses as in the celebration of the great event which gave them the extra importance in the procession.

The bridegroom was duly received by the bride's father and conducted into the hall; not however until two elderly ladies brought some red-coloured water in a plate, waved it round his head and body and threw it away—I suppose, to counteract any possible harm from evil spirits and evil eyes. The hall was by that time thronged with people eager to catch a glimpse of the young suitor. Those who already knew him and those who were to see him for the first time, were equally

impatient for a look. To every one his face presented a fresh handsome appearance, and all hearts leaped with joy, particularly the hearts of old ladies, for they could easily see that fair Goodboy was the best match for lovely Chanchal. He was in his teens and would soon grow into a taller and comelier figure, and with God's blessing he might make his mark in the world and rise to be as great as his worthy father; and he had his father's wealth to boot. The off-spring of the union—never a remote consideration—were sure to be such sweet things, old dames had already seen them and stretched their arms to hug them to their hearts!

The confusion of joy subsiding in a couple of minutes, order prevailed. The preliminary invocation was then made to the God of ceremonies, and after the ritual of purification the anointing of the bridegroom was gone through and he was conducted into the bath-room.

The bath over, the bridegroom was brought and seated in the place specially arranged for the ceremony, and as usual it was decorated with powder-drawings on the floor and ever-greens and festoons around and above. The parents of the bride with their chief priest on the side were seated opposite, and the

many Gods who preside over the countless phases of human life and destiny were 'duly invoked with the recitation of sacred texts. Then, in the presence of these invisible Deities and the visible assembly around, of relatives, friends and priests and men learned in the sacred lore, the great ceremonial was commenced which would finally give away the bride to the bridegroom and create an everlasting, indissoluble tie between them.

The bride's parents poured milk on the bridegroom's feet and washed them in a silver tray. Then they honoured him with gifts of clothes and valuables, the wedding ring and many other things, and last came the most important gift, they were to bestow on him, of their dear child, who was still in an inner apartment. A cloth was soon stretched as a curtain in front of the bridegroom; and the bride was presently brought and seated on the other side with her parents. The *gótras* and ancestors of both were again duly repeated, and the parents, placing the hands of their darling daughter, from under the curtain, into those of the bridegroom, the holy text was pronounced and with the pouring of holy water, the gift was made—the last and most precious for earthly and heavenly ends—of their most beloved treasure, lovely Chanchal!

The curtain was then removed and for the first time the young couple were face to face within a foot of each other, but the sweet thing bent her head in bashful modesty. The couple then went through the process—a most funny and exciting one—of pouring yellow-coloured rice on each other's heads, which they did repeatedly and in profusion, and, as it looked, almost in a spirit of emulation!

The gift finished, the parents of the bride retired from their place. But it had to be confirmed and consecrated by the tie of the sacred *Táli*—the visible emblem of the union which was for ever to be indissoluble. A yellow-coloured string, spun by old couples, had already been passed through the head of that golden pendant. It was now sent round in the assembly, to be touched and blessed by every one present, particularly the aged. Liberal pinches of yellow-coloured rice were distributed to all. After these preliminaries were finished the holy text was recited, and whilst the drums beat one continuous tamtam and all eyes eagerly watched, the bridegroom fastened the first—the second—and—the *third* and final knot, and the *TALI* was for ever tied on the neck of Chanchal! And from that moment she would be his

~~better~~ half, both here and hereafter—~~better~~, because through her he should attain bliss in this and in the next world. The benediction was then pronounced and yellow rice rained profusely from all corners on the heads of the young couple.

Just then, the clock struck twelve and the Song of Joy was sung by the pipers and the lady - singers in our group, alternately. Here's my version of the chorus — admire it!

— Sing joy!— Sing peace! our beloved prince Rám
And our beautiful Seetha in wedlock are calm!

Oh! never before had the sweetness of that song touched my soul so deeply as it did on Wednesday last. It sent a thrill through my whole being, and I wept tears of joy. So did the mother of the bridegroom whose ecstasy was boundless at the sight of her beloved son elevated to the stage of progress and prosperity; as also the mother of the bride whose heart alternately heaved with happiness and sunk into vacuum — the vacuum of parting, sooner or later, from her darling daughter, and the happiness, she already pictured, of seeing a happy young mother, her own blood and bone. Nor was any feminine heart in our group but shared the great joy and spoke it through the eyes.

Of the men, I could say nothing from observation; but I fancy even *their* hearts must have felt the solemnity of the occasion and melted at the spectacle of the gentler sex. But business must be got through. So they soon began to announce, one by one, the gifts of clothes and valuables from relatives and friends. This over, the Grand Benediction was pronounced in one sublime chant by all the learned priests who were present, and it was conveyed to the wedded pair through showers of yellow rice.

Then, as usual, two young ladies jointly brought a round plate with two lights, and standing in front of the couple sang the Song of Blessing which was however hardly audible. They hastily waved the plate before the pair and departed with half-suppressed smiles; for they felt so shy to come before such a large gathering and to sing too in the presence of so many of the other sex. The assembly then dispersed after the distribution of presents to the learned Bráhmans and *chandan* and *támbool* to all.

LETTER XXIV

DEAREST,—Yesterday I gave you a pretty detailed account of the ceremonial which was gone through, at noon, on the first day of the wedding. One would think that the marriage became an accomplished fact with the tying of the *Táli* and that the religious portion of it was over, though festivities and minor ceremonies might extend longer. But I soon learnt it was not so. There was yet a most important ceremony to be gone through at night on the first day, and I heard the chief priest say the marriage would be incomplete without it.

There were ceremonies of one kind or another on all the days, and at first I was inclined to think that some of them were superfluous; but in the end, the five - days' celebration seemed to me an exceedingly beautiful arrangement, for the ceremonies which were gone through on the fifth were by no means insignificant and certainly not less

touching. Indeed, there were more hearts that were melted and more eyes that were moistened on the night of the fifth day than on the morning of the first.

It was three on Wednesday afternoon by the time dinner was over, or perhaps I should say breakfast, because our people—at least the orthodox and unanglicised—don't have any tea or coffee or bread or biscuits before their first meal, which as you know they never take before the bath and the subsequent prayers. Many relatives and a few friends were present at the dinner, and there were nearly a thousand poor Bráhmans—the uninvited but not on that account unserved guests at Bráhman marriages. Everybody felt tired after the sumptuous meal that was given, and many stole away immediately while a few stretched themselves here and there for the nap they couldn't resist.

The principals could however take no rest. From four o' clock, visitors of all castes began to pour into the Music Pavilion—officials, lawyers, merchants and other gentlemen—and the host and his band were busy receiving them and respecting them with *chandán*, flowers and *támbool*. The usual music and dancing of the nautch-girl were however missing in the pavilion, for your

friend like yourself is a sympathiser ~~with~~ the 'Anti-Nautch Movement' — an evident misnomer for 'Anti-Nautch-Girl Movement'; — but a violinist of some repute was engaged to entertain the visitors, and it seems his performance was very much appreciated. But good heavens! when I happened to pass by the balcony I caught sight of the painful contortions of his face, and oh! they made me so sick I really felt sorry I had found fault that morning with your namesake for not having arranged any music for the ladies; and my regret was all the greater for your friend had promised to get up something special for us on a subsequent day.

We did not however fare badly that evening in our ladies' quarter. We had not of course as many visitors as the pavilion, but several respectable ladies with their little ones honoured us with their presence. It was much of a *conversazione* with us, and we enjoyed it immensely. We had indeed no scientific music but some of us did not stint to treat the gathering to stray songs; and to be sure, we had no experience of any contortions or convulsions which seemed to suit and please the men well enough!

The sun had set, and with the many lamps and lustres scattering their light on every

side, the 'Bush' presented a very brilliant appearance. At seven, the Sacred Fire was kindled at the southern end of the hall, and in front of it, the bridegroom and the bride were seated side by side. The chief priest and a few learned Bráhmans with some relatives of the couple were all that were present, as the majority of the male folk preferred to be in the pavilion or elsewhere. Holy texts were recited and many offerings of rice and ghee were consigned to the charge of the Sacred Fire—the carrier of the Gods.

The bridegroom and the bride were then taken outside into the open air and shown the 'Great Bear' which represents the seven great Hindu saints, as also the twinkling Arundhati—the wife of the greatest of them—the Hindu ideal of feminine virtue and chastity. After worship was duly offered to those heavenly bodies, the wedded couple were conducted back into the hall, and there, hand in hand, they were made to walk seven steps before the Sacred Fire—the symbol of Light, the very genesis and life of the Universe. It was the last and final ceremony which gave the stamp of eternal indissolubility to the holy union.

LETTER XXV

THE second day was practically a day of rest, except that there were the dinner and the feeding of Bráhmans as well as the music in the pavilion and the gathering of ladies in the inner hall—which were all constant items throughout the marriage.

The third was a most busy day, at least for the gentlemen. Great men learned in the Sástras and the Védas and all manner of sacred lore assembled from far and near, and there were also distinguished students of philosophy, masters of music, poets and scholars. The congregation was indeed a large one and in its elevating presence the Deities were again solemnly invoked and the Grand Benediction was once more pronounced on the married couple by all the holy men present; and it was done in a most sublime and heaven-resounding chant. But the hardest and most dilatory business of the day was the distribution by the father of the

bridegroom—for it was the day of special rejoicing to *his* party—of suitable rewards and presents to the many learned men, as also of money doles to the poor of all classes, of whom no less than three to four thousand had gathered on the spacious grounds. At night, there was the procession of the wedded couple through the principal streets of the city, and it was indeed on a grand scale with band and music and a plenteous display of fireworks of varieties.

The fourth was a day of partial rest. We had a special entertainment for ladies in the evening, and at night there was a special dinner or supper, as you may call it, for the gentry; and there were very funny incidents on both those occasions, but I must postpone my narration of them for the present.

An hour or two before the dawn of the fifth or final day of the marriage, ceremonies were performed in the presence of the Sacred Fire, by way of thanksgiving and farewell to the many Deities who presided over the marriage and blessed the married couple.

The early hours of the fifth night witnessed the solemn and imposing spectacle of ceremonies and offerings for the propitiation of evil spirits and for the protection of the married couple; and the talisman of black

beads, with the gold pendant in the middle; was tied around the neck of the child-bride to guard her and hers through life.

The bride was then formally handed over to the husband and his family; and the marriage closed with farewell and presents of clothes to the many relatives and friends who had honoured the happy occasion with their presence and invested the wedded couple with their best wishes and blessings.

Dearest, I cannot, at least in the present letter, attempt to give you any account of that most touching and melting finalé of the marriage — the handing over of the bride. The very thought of the scene brings tears into my eyes, as you see from these blots.

LETTER XXVI

DEAREST, —It was indeed very good of you to have suggested the Phonograph to your namesake, for the special entertainment of ladies on the fourth evening. We enjoyed it immensely, and the children—oh! I cannot describe their delight. They *would* have nothing but the Laughing Song from the beginning to the end. The Laughing Song with its rhythmical peals of laughter conquered every one of us, young and old. The band pieces were very good and sounded quite as loud as a real performance. The flute was extremely pleasant and the vocal records were perfect, one of them even to a cough which the singer couldn't suppress in the middle of his song. But nothing carried me away so much as *ninu viná ná madendu* — the sweetest piece I have ever heard sung in praise of the Almighty, in that sweetest of languages, the musical TELUGU. I have broken my vow with the *Veena* and troubled it

with this piece since my return, and the poet's hand has also been busy at it. I am sending you the article fresh from the manufactory.

Thy beaut'ous form is in my eyes,
Thy sweet name on my tongue e'er lies,
Thy glory's song my ears rejoice:
My soul's in Thee O Lord!

Where'er I step, whate'er I see,
In solitude or friendship's glee,
In waking mood or reverie,
My soul's in Thee O Lord!

I listened to the soft strain with closed eyes, which made it the more real to my mind, and I fancied *I* was singing it—in *your* praise! I was about to ask the exhibitor to do it again when somehow he repeated it himself, and this time I was simply unhinged and thrown into ecstasy. Oh, the bliss of it and the happiness of picturing you into the piece! I had almost gone into a swoon over it and spoiled the entertainment, but the next thing created quite a sensation in our group and woke me up as if with electric shocks in quick succession.

It was a piece of most unbecoming rudeness and impertinence and I had a good mind to give it hard to the goblin who stood grinning, in apparent expectation of our appreciation and applause; but no one

seemed to notice the thing with the exception of two or three little fellows who remarked that it was some "quarrelling and beating." I felt so glad that Mrs. Bow-Row who had been present all through the marriage absented herself from the entertainment, owing to some inconvenience, for that last record was but a reproduction of the recent amities between her and her husband. Some wicked imitating buffoon had evidently put it into the phonograph and the dreaming driveller exhibited it in ignorance of its real application. There was everything in it except the names: the hot words about the cold tea, the throwing it at the face, the retort of the spirited girl, the kicking and the crying—altogether, it sounded so real!

At the close of the entertainment, I went near the table to examine the curious writing on that particular cylinder, but I dropped it down by chance, and what a pity!—it was broken into a dozen bits. I was quite confused and cursed myself for my carelessness and offered to make good the loss, but the man, with all his inward grief, was full of the politest words and repeatedly begged me not to mention it. I need hardly say that my lady friends did not think ill of me for my untidy handling, and I learnt after-

wards to my great relief that the author of that imitation had left the country and was not likely to return.

LETTER XXVII

It was a happy coincidence that the special dinner for gentlemen — which was allotted to Saturday to suit officials and lawyers — fell on the fourth day of the wedding, the day of special dinner for the bridegroom's party. The invitations were select, and the big hall and the narrow wing adjoining it were filled with the élite of the community, and the bridegroom's party. The inner square and its wings were filled with ladies, who were arranged in two opposite rows according as they represented the bridegroom or the bride. The wedded pair had from the beginning been the special property of the ladies, and their dinner had always been in the ladies' quarter. And it gave the ladies of both sides, old and young, no small delight to see them mess together and to induce them with occasional hints to help each other.

Special sentinels of flour and special lights — a couple of inches in height — were kept

near the seats of the bridegroom's party in both the halls—it was said, as marks of special honour, though in reality they served as so many standing and shining jokes.

The dinner commenced at eight o' clock and lasted for a couple of hours. There wasn't a single soul that didn't enjoy it and the fun, and we feared our sides would split with laughter. It was the ladies who contributed to the mirth, but we could hear the gentlemen sharing in it from the distance. Oh! it was all so splendid.

Both parties in the ladies' hall had singers, and they were full of songs replete with fun and frolic. The attack was commenced by one of the ladies on the bridegroom's side singing a severe criticism of the dinner and of the reception given. This was answered piecemeal from the other side, who now fired a fresh volley upon the bridegroom's mother. It proceeded from your Ganga who represented the hostess. She referred to the oddities and eccentricities of the lady attacked, her rustic manners and clumsiness, her want of refinement, her heavy jewellery, her quarrelsome disposition, her greed, her snub nose, and many other items—not excluding her secret flirtations—revealed during those four days. On behalf of the

honourable lady so rudely assailed, one of the party sang forth a rejoinder which did not spare the hostess in the least. Then, two bonny cousins of the bride sang a long duet attacking the bridegroom's sisters, which referred to their shrewish temper, their coquetry, their artful ways and sweet words, their vanity and ignorance, their fruitless endeavours to look beautiful, their gluttony, and not a few odd particulars pertaining to their dress, ornaments, appearance and character; and it ended by calling them low creatures who owed their all to the good luck which secured them good husbands. This was highly resented by four young ladies of the other side who stood as sisters to the bridegroom. By turns, they levelled invective after invective against the assailants. It was hard to say which party did the best, but both parties enjoyed the conflict and a loud laughter spread through our hall, which deprived us of all music for the next quarter of an hour.

Exhortations began to come from the gentlemen's hall and fire was renewed — this time against the males. The bridegroom's brothers were sung to bits by the blithesome cousins of the bride, who not only mocked their gaudy dress, their boastful words, their

bad habits and unholy company, but pulled hard at their moustaches. The watchful sisters of the bridegroom came to the rescue and turned the tables against those who stood as brothers to the bride. Then followed a very interesting hand-to-hand fight, in which each bit of attack from the one side was at once answered from the other.

It was a most lively contest and did not spare even the bridegroom and the bride, for each party contended that the other was the gainer by the new alliance. In the relative estimate of the respect of both families, which followed, one of the girls—I forget from which party—sang about some one of the other party, a man of some ostensible education and position, going to a wedding dinner without invitation—conduct which, she said, the meanest person she knew couldn't be guilty of. She sang this in a pretty loud key and it produced quite an uproar in the gentlemen's hall. For it seems, as if in consequence of it, one of the guests, hastily swallowing the little that remained in his leaf, left the place most unceremoniously! And to be sure, he was not seen afterwards in the pavilion where *chandan*, flowers and *támbool* were distributed to the departing guests.

It was Empty-Ram! and the whisper went round from mouth to mouth that he had come to the dinner *un-in-vi-ted*! I couldn't bring myself to believe it until your namesake told me he had sent him no invitation and showed me the list. Indeed, he said he was hardly acquainted with the man. But then, how and why did the good man go there? This puzzled me still.

My difficulty was soon solved, for I learnt that Empty-Ram had discussed the matter that morning with a brother lawyer, hoping to bring him round to his view but in vain. True, he had received no invitation but how could it be when others near him had the honour? Was he now the same insignificant Empty he had been sometime back before joining the Bar? It was no doubt the mistake of the fool who had delivered the invitations. If he didn't go to the dinner, he would be conspicuous by his absence and his status would surely suffer if it came to be thought that he had been ignored and left out: whereas if he went, no one would know anything about the missing invitation. But why these arguments? He would go to the 'Bush' to see his friend, the father of the bridegroom, and would stay for dinner, only — *only* — if he was pressed hard.

So Empty-Ram went to the 'Bush' about half an hour before the dinner-time and did see his friend for a minute or two; but the friend took him to be one of the invited and didn't press the dinner upon him. Neither could he have done it if he had been aware of the situation, for he was himself no more than a guest. The dinner-call having come, gentlemen began to quit the pavilion for the hall and Empty-Ram — to his eternal shame — quietly slipped in and helped himself to a place! His mind was however somewhat perturbed and didn't permit him to share in the conversation, even if his empty head gave him any scope; but he enjoyed his dinner well enough, until the cruel blow came from the ladies' quarter and he observed everybody staring at him and laughing! — laughing too, without the commonest politeness! How could he degrade himself any longer by staying amidst such vile company? Without a moment's hesitation, he departed clean out of the hall and the house. Poor, poor Empty-Ram!

LETTER XXVIII

BELOVED OF MY HEART,—Your note of Saturday just to hand. I sent you my version of the chorus that you might “admire” *not* me for my poor lines, but the unspeakable feeling of joy and happiness which flows in them. You have instead smothered me with your praises!—for a couple of lines too, which can never in our vapid, vapoury tongue reproduce the rich sweetness of the original TELUGU—*ánandam-ánandam-áyenoo*.

I really wonder what you will say of my production of Saturday or of what I may send you in a day or two. But let me have my cry, for I was crying when your letter arrived. I have been crying since morning, and cannot help it either, so long as I am at this task. I shall write to you to-morrow if I have done my cry.

Kiss me, O Dearest, in my tears! Kiss me for my sake and for the sake of those who have brought me up with the tenderest

of affection. Kiss me again and again, in your sleep and—in your dreams.

I press my lips a thousand times on the pure space below. Oh, let yours meet them and exchange the elixir of love and happiness!

LETTER XXIX

DEAREST,—I have done my task and my cry. All yesterday, I was on the pathetic song sung at the close of Chanchal's wedding. The scene came before my mind with all its tender emotion and my eyes were flooded with tears. Oh, the painful happiness of it—so melting, so piercing!

The time came for the parents of the bride to hand over their dear little treasure into the family of her husband. It was a most trying ceremony, but one which every parent of a daughter must go through. Your namesake's countenance had already been affected by the thought of the ordeal at hand. His wife was by his side, a living skeleton, and sweet Chanchal was between them. The parents and relatives of the bridegroom had to be called, one by one, and respected with *chandan* and *támbool* and presents of clothes, and then entrusted with the care and keeping of the new comer. But before all, the chief

priest, as the embodiment of divine virtue, had to be honoured. Accordingly, after the due presentation of *chandan*, *támbool* and clothes, the parents jointly placed the hands of the young bride into the hands of the holy man, and with quivering lips and many breaks and pauses, the father recited the sacred text which unscrewed every heart :

This tender child — now barely eight —
We've loved and brought up like a son —
Henceforward she's thy pupil's mate —
Oh treat her with affection !

The holy man held both his hands over the sweet innocent, and with the utterance of holy words he put three pinches of yellow rice upon her head and blessed her in abundance.

The whole of that process from the *chandan* to the blessing was repeated with the bridegroom's father, then his mother, then his brothers and their wives, sisters and their husbands, paternal uncles and their wives, cousins and other near relatives, — always one at a time, the sacred text undergoing a slight alteration according to the relationship to the bridegroom.

At last, it came to the bridegroom. It was no formal, no nominal handing over that was going to be repeated, but a *real* surrender —

the transfer of a most precious treasure from hands which reared it so long and with such tenderness into hands which were to own it and keep it henceforth and for ever,—it was to be hoped, with equal care and tenderness. This reality flashed upon every mind, and tears of sincerest sympathy for the poor affectionate parents trickled from every eye.

It was the actual tearing of flesh from flesh, the pulling of bone from bone! The climax had been reached, and the father and the mother could hardly perform that last and most important function. They were agitated more than ever. Their grief flowed in torrents from their hearts—they did not know why. And when at length, with trembling hands, they placed the hands of their darling child into the hands of him who was after all to be a new son to them, they sobbed like very children! The sacred text which had already been repeated a dozen times could hardly escape the lips of the breathless father. Between the sobs, and with breaks and pauses, he slowly uttered it—bit by bit—

This tender child—now barely eight—
We've loved—and brought up like a son—
Henceforward—she's thy loving mate—
Oh treat her—with affection!

There was a fresh pathos in every word, and

not a soul but was thrilled by its touch, not a heart but was melted by its fire, nor an eye but was bathed in its flood!

A most solemn silence ensued, and in a couple of minutes a middle - aged lady began to pour forth the Finalé in the softest strains. Its melody touched and subdued every soul. So beautiful, so pathetic is the song, it is impossible to approach it without tears, which I shed without limit yesterday in my effort to produce a version of its most touching part —

THE MOTHER'S PETITION.

1

SISTER kind! this darling treasure,
Flesh and blood of us and bone,
Now thy son's we've made with pleasure:
Take her, sister! she's thine own.

2

Many prayers had we sent up
Ere this gift of Gods we earned:
Fondly feeding her from love - cup
E'er as life to love have learned.

3

Soul of soul this sweet one giving,
Sister! pardon mother's pride:
Life of life this dear one parting,
Sister! how can feelings hide?

4

Trusting all t' Almighty blindly
We this tender thing did rear:
Call her gently, speak her kindly,
I beseech thee, sister dear.

5

Meeker than the lamb in meekness,
Timid as the timid deer,
Sister! angry words and glances
Ever shake her frame with fear!

6

Crude, unwrought, with polish little,
Soft obedience all she brings:
Mould her, think her never brittle,
Sister! teach her skill in things.

7

Oh! this little mite, this blessing,
Rock and comfort mine I part!
Mother-like within thee feeling,
Sister! won't thou read my heart?

8

E'er my darling's form cherubic
Filled my soul with greatest glee;
E'er to me her voice was music:
Sister! won't it be to thee?

9

E'er my sweet one's smile was gladness.
That acutest pain did heal;
Oh! her tear was e'er my sadness:
Sister! won't thou likewise feel?

10

Deep within the breast her longing
And her pain she would not show
E'er I knew without her telling:
Sister! won't thou likewise know?

11

Mine this child, my soul and body
Oh! I tear and give to thee!
Evermore to th' orphan fully
Sister! won't thou mother be?

12

Sister! grant this mother's prayer!
Sister! take this child as thine!
Sister! love her as thy daughter!
Sister! lay thy hand in mine!

13

Oh! my eyes that daily saw her
Shall they not their dear one see!
And my voice that softly called her
Must it ever silent be!

14

Ah! my dearest 'darling precious,
Go'st thou unto mother new!
And to me that am fictitious
Art thou saying thy adieu!

15

Henceforth, oh this home is darkness!
Oh this heart despair will strike!
Who will flooding mirth and gladness
Brighten heart and home alike?

16

Who melodious veena playing
Sweetest songs will sweetly sing?
Who will little girls inviting
Play and feast with them and swing?

17

O my pet! my gem! my treasure!
How without thee can I live?
Gracious Heav'n alone must measure
Great my grief and comfort give.

18

Darling sweet! still keep a corner
Of thy heart for me exiled!
Weep not, dearest! here thy mother!
Sister! here thy chosen child!

LETTER XXX

AND now, Beloved, who can say that our Hindu marriage is not a most solemn, a most touching ceremonial, full of the most beautiful meaning? Performed in the presence, specially invoked, of the Almighty — of the many invisible Deities into which Man's limited comprehension analyses the Incomprehensible; sanctified by the recitation of holy texts before the Sacred Fire and other symbols which remind man of the Infinite which surrounds him; blessed by the best holy men from far and near; witnessed and rejoiced in by thousands of people of all classes and conditions, rich and poor and old and young; — I cannot imagine anything more solemn in the conception, more sacred in the ceremonial, more beautiful in the arrangement, more striking in the finalé than our Hindu marriage.

Chanchal's wedding has proved to me that the five - days' arrangement with the alternate

rest, the ceremonies and the charities, is the only one which could give reality to the invisible presence of the Deities who are invoked, the welcome accorded to them and the farewell: and the pathos of the finalé and its moral effect on life would be completely marred by any unnatural and unbecoming haste. Indeed, I am convinced that a one-day Hindu wedding like Empty-Ram's is an altogether empty proceeding, no better than a wedding on the stage and not more proper than an invitation to a fast.

Extol the Christian wedding, dearest, by all means—it has much in it that is noble and excellent. But do not disparage the Hindu marriage. The two proceed on altogether different principles—their conception is different. The one is a religious ceremony, a sacred gift by parents and a passive acquiescence in that gift—in fact, a tie entered in the Invisible Register of Heaven, accepted entirely as a duty for ends beyond life. The other is in practice the fulfilment of an engagement; a mutual choice and acceptance, by the parties, of each other—a tie entered in a visible Register, sought primarily for earthly perfection. Both ties are indeed sanctified by invocation to the Almighty, but the one is absolutely indissoluble, the other

can be dissolved, at least by law — though it has often puzzled me how a contract entered into before a holy person, amidst holy surroundings and after invocation to the Almighty, could be revoked without reference to Him and without the surroundings.

Do you consider the divorce a blessing? — I will not quarrel with you. But don't expect it in the Hindu marriage which is incompatible with the idea — the Hindu marriage which sprouts from duty and aims at the fruit of duty. Do you pooh-pooh this duty? — I will not quarrel with you, either. But do not link it with divorce, for they can never agree — they are poison to each other. You can no more force the English divorce into the Hindu marriage than you can put the colour of the Englishman into the Hindu.

Beloved, I have so much in me which rebels against restraint and which I meant to let loose, but my pen has run out — your own which you presented to me — and I must stop for want of the fluid close by. I never like the pencil as a substitute.

LETTER XXXI

DEAREST, — Last night, my pen disappointed me and I went to bed at once. But I was so full my sleep was much disturbed and even now I feel somewhat drowsy and — dreamy.

Of late, I have taken a little too much to observation, and my rambles are not perhaps quite to your liking. But you have not said so, and as you know, I can never keep the smallest bit of my life from you who are my sole trustee and confidant.

If you should think I have begun to dislike and entertain a contempt for our English-educated brethren, you would be doing me an injustice, for I have no greater regard for any other class. But I do believe that many of them are going headlong in their wholesale condemnation of their own system, of which they know but little, and their appreciation and imitation of foreign systems and practices from a mere superficial study. Isn't it indeed

sickening to see so many of our so-called educated men and reformers prating about our religion, who know not one scintilla of Hinduism, so many condemning our temples, our idols and our processions, who do not understand their significance and cannot ponder for one moment that the Christain system which they seem so much to appreciate is not devoid of churches or symbols or even processions?

These wiseacres find fault with our hero-worship — and I don't know if hero-worship is a sin — yet they cannot see that, in truth, English people are given to it even more than we are: else what are their statues and memorials and anniversaries? They sneer at our ceremonies for the dead but they forget the All Souls' Day of Christians, of which, by the way, Miss Lovely gave me an interesting account last year. They scoff at our religious bands but they are blind to the Salvation Army of Christian extraction. I wonder if there is *any* religion on earth which has not given rise to offshoots and outgrowths of one kind or another, or any system whatsoever which is altogether free from forms and superstitions.

I consider them honest people who go off to the religion or the community which rightly

or wrongly they esteem above their own, though some of them play the fox who lost his tail. But I have no patience with those who preach against funeral ceremonies yet perform them to please their grandmother, who wax warm upon widow-marriage yet get bed-ridden when a brother or a cousin sets the example, or who deliver sermons against nautch-girls but will not persuade themselves or their kith and kin to marry the youngest virgin from that class. Honesty is worthy of praise though wisdom may have gone wool-gathering, but wisdom cannot be extolled when it puts on a cloak of dishonesty or dissimulation.

Dearest, am I too hard? Forgive me if I am — you know it is my nature never to be sparing in my attacks. I must needs learn to moderate myself: *you* must teach it to your pupil. Of course, I mean nothing personal. Let them wear the cap whom it fits. It is a genuine worsted article, rough but health-giving! — unlike your miserable pith-turban, with its soft lifeless exterior concealing the most detestable rot and rubbish! Scan it and see it inside out, and love me for my lecture!

LETTER XXXII

AT last, it has come! and I am so delighted with it, dearest, I have actually devoured it these two hours. It is exactly a month since I gave the order, the day after the great surprise of the ruby bracelets. I had meant it as a surprise for you on your arrival for the marriage at the 'Bush'. But you disappointed me and the painter disappointed me, too. He has been four weeks at the work instead of two. But better late than never, and I have forgiven the man in the great ecstasy I am feeling.

Can you tell me what it is? I am sure you *cannot*, and I have half a mind to reserve the thing for a surprise when you do come. But I haven't the heart to tease you, and we women, you know, are so simple we can hardly keep a secret!

Ah, don't you say you have already guessed it!—"It's an oil-painting of my lady meant for a present to my humble self!"—

That's it! you are quite right, by which I mean you are quite wrong! It is neither an oil - painting of your lady — who, thank God, is not quite vain enough for such a thing — nor is it meant for a present to your good self. I have got it done for my own selfish use, and it is—YOURSELF!

Mark, Beloved, the great difference between a man's love and a woman's. A woman gives her whole heart and being to her lord, and she adores him as her ideal. A man does nothing of the kind: new ideals ever please him and fairies ever catch his fancy! Am I wrong?

Apply it, dearest, in your own case. These two years we have lived together, you took the greatest pains to collect the paintings of Ravi Varma, those especially of the fairies. You liked them, to be sure, and I never said a word when you placed them so prominently in our bed-room, though I could hardly bear to look at the frontless creature playing the ball. And I should surely have set it down as the most cunning flattery if you had an oil-painting done of 'my lady' and put it in its place.

But I have forestalled you! This painting of your sweet self is a trifle larger than your favourite picture, and I mean to hide that

eye-sore from view by placing you against it! for I cannot suffer, the wench to be seen anywhere, call me mad or jealous as you like. I have so long been accustomed to see the wicked thing in its place, that wherever I sleep, it is the first sight which dawns on my vision when I awake, and I am so glad I have found a way out of it and such a good one too!

You know I am so irrational and incorrigible in this matter, and though you always ridiculed it as silly superstition, I could never, for the life of me, dispense with a fresh nap if I happened to see a cat the first thing in the morning when I got up from bed. But now I shall be all right, for your picture and its reflection will always be on either side of me, and I can commence life everyday with a look at your smiling countenance and feel happy that nothing unlucky or untoward can happen!—yes, and go to bed too with the sweet sight in my closing eyes and dream of you the livelong night!

LETTER XXXIII

BELOVED KRISHNA!—I have written the word and I will let it stand—will you call me brazen? This point has let it go unawares and I cannot blame it either. Your form is every minute before me and your sweet name is ever on my tongue, as the song goes. What wonder if my pen, in close communion with my soul, has played the traitor!—the pen which is your present too.

But dearest, why indeed may I not address you by your dear name? Will it not please you, the sound which comes from the chords of love? Oh, what a pleasant thrill I feel when you call me by my name, and how lavishly I kiss my little pet when he addresses me exactly as you do!

Some of our customs seem to me indeed silly and stupid. How very idiotic that a husband should feel abashed to call his wife or the wife her husband by the name! And what extraordinary force a long-formed habit

has on the human mind in either sex ! For amongst your own kind, even amongst the educated and the reformed and reforming, I don't believe there are many who will not run into antics if they were asked to mention their wives' names, let alone their addressing them at home every day.

Examples will be superfluous for what is an everyday occurrence in every Hindu household. But I will give a few very choice ones from my own personal experience, if you will not take offence : for I am in a vein which may not permit me to spare even those who are dear to you.

Some years ago, when I was quite a girl, I found a judge at his wits' end when he wanted to call his wife and there was nobody near. He was obliged to call her himself, which he did in a pretty manner by shouting *Adee !—what dee !—what !—where dee !—* But there was no response and when from sheer pity, I left the verandah where I was constructing my favourite castle with cards and went within his vision, he commissioned me to call *It*, by which of course I understood that he meant his lady. Now, surely, isn't that a very endearing style of address and a very elevating pronominal reference too !

Shall I give you another instance—one which occurred very recently at Chanchal's wedding and in the presence of many people? Chanchal's father-in-law—a big man too and educated—had to call his lady for something, and presuming she was within hearing, he shouted *Oseh!—what eh!—Come here eh!—where eh!—are you not there eh!*—and getting no response, he deputed a boy close by to call *Them*—a certainly more courteous reference, but he was no judge, and I am not quite sure that the plural did not belong to the plain undisguised *It!*

As I am about to begin a new para, I hear loud knocks at the door of our third-door neighbours', accompanied with louder shouts—*Elo!—what O!—where O!—open the door O!*—It is no other than the good husband Mr. Bow-Row affectionately addressing his dear young lady who is evidently in the backyard and cannot hear, having plugged her ears with cotton as a protection from cold in this nasty chill weather. Heaven bless her! I hope she will not be treated to a fresh proof of her beloved man's engrossing affection.

Are these examples enough? And will you tell me, pray, how Ganga's husband calls her and how your own old fa — but

these are personal matters and I will let them alone. By the way, do you find anything better with the so-called social reformers? I have no experience, but I know one of them always refers to his lady in the neuter gender! I am extremely curious to learn if this is the example set by the biggest of their class.

Dearest, does it not reflect much glory upon our good sex that though the wives feel too shy to address the husbands by their names, they at any rate do not shout loud interjections and ellipses for them and never refer to them except in the most unquestionable masculine gender, which they invariably pluralise or mister out of respect?

I have heard of an educated gentleman who got out of the difficulty in a very ingenious manner—by promulgating a very simple code in his household, which was a somewhat large one composed of more than half-a-dozen brothers and their wives. The code was no more than a serial use of M and F for the several members of either sex in their order, and proved, it seems, very serviceable in the family, and even the ladies used it freely without abashment. But it is a bit too mathematical for ordinary use, and besides it isn't a lucky one; for I heard that after the code was introduced, some of the known

quantities in the family passed away into the region of the unknown.

A more convenient and certainly more stylish nomenclature came to my notice very recently. The loving pair gave themselves fanciful pseudonyms and freely addressed each other, both in private and in public, as ROSE and APPLE. I would strongly commend this expedient to all fashionable gentlemen, especially the big-wigs, who tremble at the mention of their ladies' names, and it has the approbation, too, of the poet who sings—

“What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.”

Have I not told you, dearest, that my friend Miss Lovely was a most lively, amiable and affectionate girl? Oh, I am so fond of her and she is fond of me too! I remember once she called me her dearest dear darling dearie and embraced me and kissed me so — I kissed her back for the warm stream of her affection, nor did I mind that I was transgressing the etiquette of society. My friend revealed to me some of the funniest forms of endearment occasionally used by European couples, but I don't remember them all. No matter, for I think the day is yet far off when the most extravagant of our

Hindu pairs will resort to '*clarified honey*' or '*loaf-sugar*', or to '*pussy*' or '*doggie*' or '*goossie*', to express the depth of their endearment !

Do you see, Beloved, how much I have in me which I have not found time to reveal to you during these two years ? After all, what is two years in Love's long life ? We are still at the title-page, drinking of the beauty of the bold characters standing at the top, which spell mysterious LOVE. Oh ! when shall we read the great book together ? When shall we enjoy it and admire it and feel happy in company ? When shall we laugh and weep, and burn and cool, and feast and fast, and live and die together ? Oh ! when when indeed !

LETTER' XXXIV

DEAREST,—We were at the Circus last night. They said it was a particularly good programme arranged for Their Excellencies, who however did not turn up. But I couldn't enjoy much of it, for the whole time I was there I felt as if I were sitting on thorns though we were comfortably seated in a family box and besides myself and my parents there were with us only Chanchal and her parents.

Immediately after we seated ourselves, as ill luck would have it, my eyes happened to fall upon a prominent figure that was occupying all alone the box opposite ours on the other side of the circle, and I felt at once that the pleasure of the performance would be lost for me; for, turn how I might, I couldn't avoid the impertinent looks of the man, who not only made eyes at me in a most insulting manner, but without the least shame or hesitation took out a binocular

and directing it to this side and that for a minute, finally turned it towards me! I had a great mind to spit at him as a friend of mine once did at Empty-Ram, but I thought it was more dignified not to notice the fool and resolved to content myself with seeing as much of the performance as would be visible within the semi-circle close to us.

Do you care to know who the idiot was? I am sure I cannot say, but I learnt casually that he was a Rájah or a Maharájah—maybe the same jackass who you told me had once taken his courtesan hand in hand to an entertainment given to a Viceroy!

In spite of my precaution, the man and his glass were before my brain the whole time the performance lasted, and his wicked glances pierced through it again and again and made me quite uneasy and incapable of enjoying even the little I did see. It was the mischief of my Imagination. I couldn't sleep one wink the whole of last night and felt quite giddy this morning; but, thank God, I have cured it, and in a mysterious manner too!

Like repels like, they say, and I healed the evil effects of my Imagination by further Imagination! I looked steadily into your sweet eyes this morning and imagined they

were sending angry glances at the binocular, when lo! in a couple of minutes, the instrument disappeared, the man took to his heels and hastily getting into his dogcart drove away so recklessly he came to grief over a slope and fell into the ditch close by — cart, pony and all! Poor foolish poltroon! I hope the star we observed falling last night wasn't the precursor of *his* fate. 'God made him' and therefore let him live and 'pass for a man'!

Do you think, dearest, I am going mad with my Imagination? Perhaps I am, for in your short note which I received this morning, you call me a poet! and you actually extol my latest production, the Mother's Petition! Hasn't some one said that poets are akin to mad people? But some one else assures us that 'there is a pleasure sure in being mad which none but madmen know' — 'madmen' of course including 'mad *women*' according to the logic of law!

Enough of my madness! Now to the Circus. Of the little I did see, the only things which have left any impression on my mind are the feats of the ladies on horseback. I didn't very much like their cycling—there wasn't any life or grandeur about it, and it looked somewhat like a merry-go-round as if so many ladies seated on wheels were moved by some

invisible machinery. But the riding on horse-back—oh, it was simply heavenly! and so many of them at once and on such splendid horses too! I particularly admired the performance of the young angel with her agile form, who stood on tiptoe whilst the horse moved as if on wings, and throwing her arms and body to and fro assumed such sweet fascinating poses, her dress expanding and completing her angelic appearance,—oh! the whole house was one uproar of loud applause.

Beloved, I must disclose to you one more bit of my life, to which you are yet a stranger. Ever since the power of thinking developed its sway within me, I have thought that RIDING was no mean enjoyment for ladies, and you might have guessed as much from my reference to the lady-rider whom I saw on the eclipse-day. Indeed, after my return from Chanchal's wedding, I had an idea of practising privately in our garden on our black fellow, but I gave it up fearing him too spirited for a beginner. Graceful riding I regard as much an accomplishment in ladies as in gentlemen, and if there is anything in the field of recreations which can at all compare with it, I think it is only SWIMMING. Four years ago when I accompanied Father in his trip to the West Coast

—to the 'Land of Beauties' as they call it—
I saw such a glorious spectacle of human
fairies, in half-clad forms and flowing locks,
bathing in one of the biggest tanks, — splash-
ing into the water and swimming and racing
and laughing, — I have ever since longed to
learn that fairy art, but of course in vain.

My own Dearest, teach me but these two
arts and our bliss shall be perfect. For we
could then ride together, and oh, swim to-
gether, proving the unity of our existence
both on land and in water! I wonder if the
fairies of the West Coast know riding as well.
I presume they do, — they are apparently
ahead of us in many things!

LETTER XXXV

WHAT sorrowful news! and how soon it has flashed through the length and breadth of the country! This is indeed a mysterious world. That youth and strength should go to the grave whilst age and infirmity prolong their existence! That wealth and bliss should be short-lived whilst want and woe live on forever! It must certainly be that this life is after all 'a quarantine for Paradise' and we are fools who delight in earthly baubles—in empty dreams—and fear Death as our enemy, Death who brings us a passport to a better, higher and happier life. It *must* be so! else, why does life begin with a doleful cry and end in stillness and silence? I do believe that

‘Heaven gives its favourites—early death.’

And I cannot for one moment think that death is an ever-lasting sleep from which there is no awakening.

Ah! how true the lines —

“ Death lays his icy hand on kings;
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.”

Too truly, ‘but yesterday a king’, and now he is the commonest clay! And the star which fell from the heavens on Saturday,—oh, the world is full of signs to the seeing!

What wicked bird is it whispers in my ear that the great man met his death in an adventure of love, an unholy one! and the world hides the pretty tale and gives a varnished version of the event—the world so full of lies and falsehoods! How my grief turns to pity! Has Cupid such a mighty sway over the mightiest men, over Kings and Princes and Rájahs and Mahárájahs?

Ah, it is all my Imagination—the second bit which hurled the binocular brute down into the ditch! I must rest it for a while, and to-morrow I have a good chance of doing it with the many friends whom I have invited for the Garden Swing.

LETTER^f XXXVI

AH, DEAREST, I feel so happy to be able to write to you that the weather did not disappoint us yesterday. I had indeed feared it might and prayed my star not to spoil our sport on that one merry day, which we got only once a year, and thanks to it, my star was not deaf to my prayer.

We had two swings from the two mango trees in our little garden and another — a big double swing—from the huge jack tree facing them; and it was a very nice arrangement for we could swing facing each other which gave free scope to our fun and frolic.

Nearly twenty young ladies were present and half as many little things of all ages above four. The gathering was complete by six, before ever a male soul got up from bed or the lazy sun sent his first ray into this world. We welcomed everybody with our songs while the birds chirruped to us and the soft breeze paid us homage with the perfume of flowers.

The swings were not idle for two minutes together: withal, none of us was satisfied, and we dispersed at eight o' clock when the angry sun began to approach and threatened to use his strength against us. And besides, each one had her work at home and it wasn't politic to make the old ladies grumble, for we should meet again in the afternoon when we promised ourselves greater mirth and merriment.

Indeed, we had a most pleasant and merry afternoon. We drove the sun to the other side and he hid himself behind passing clouds. And we went on swinging and swinging, and singing and shouting and laughing, playing jokes and aiming fruits and flowers at each other, sitting and standing and challenging all manner of poses and doing so many more lively things, which, if you knew, you would think us very different from the simple, modest, innocent creatures we really are!

I was indeed very glad that Bháratí was present. She had ever been sweet to me and was now become sweeter on account of her recent misfortune. Rather her fortune; for, despite her simple dress and humble style, her beauty peeped out and inclined every one to congratulate her on her freedom from the

execrable bond of an undeserving idiot, whom the sheerest evil fate had deprived of such an admirable, adorable wife. Ah, beautiful Bháratí! I know half-a-dozen lawyers and as many rich lords who would enter the lists for your hand, except that we women may not marry again whilst men may do so again and again and ever so often!

Dearest, do blessings ever come in battalions? They did so for me yesterday! While I was feeling thankful for all the good things of the day and rejoicing over Bháratí's presence, I saw the very goddess of Bliss standing before me, dressed everyway like a very Bráhmaṇ damsel—in a short petticoat and a long *cheera* with the flowing end gracefully turned over the shoulders! The petticoat was so beautiful and fitted her so nicely. It was a purple black with gold borders and the *cheera* a light sky-blue with a gold fringe. Who could it be? I stopped my swing but I couldn't believe my eyes. A feeling of veriest ecstasy fluttered through my nerves and I at once flew to my friend and clasped her to my heart. And she clung to me in her affectionate way and kissed me into the bargain!—the first item, I thought, of her fond mischief, for so many were present who would consider it a sin!—and

I kissed her in return, for I couldn't help the sweet temptation and it wasn't the first time I yielded to it.

Who could it be other than my dearest soul, Miss Lovely—the playful, simple-hearted, affectionate, angelic Miss Lovely? She had returned from the Hills only that morning and was leaving the place in a couple of days along with her father. She couldn't lose a moment in seeing me and she knew besides that it was our great Swinging Day. It would at once satisfy her youthful whim as well as prove a most pleasant surprise to us if she dressed herself like a Hindu lady and came upon the swinging scene without notice. And there she was! a very goddess from heaven, come down to participate in our hilarity! No one had noticed her coming—so softly had the sly creature stolen there—and no one thought she wasn't a Bráhmaṇ, none except keen Bháráti who could of course perceive the mask. And oh, how heavenly she looked in that dress!—the Bráhmaṇ beauty, so bewitching, so dazzling, so symmetrical, so perfect—I would have given worlds to have taken her into our community and retained her with me for ever.

When we awoke from the transport of our mutual kissing, all the ladies were before us,

and they soon formed a circle around us and began to sing 'the round dance,' for the fairies as they said. It was the mischief of brilliant Bháratí, but my friend soon interfered and threatened to make her departure if we didn't continue our sport which she came to see and enjoy. So the swings were once more busy, and my friend, discarding my excuses, forced me into the middle one, undertaking to sway it herself, which she did with a vengeance, the wicked girl, heartily hailing—"Sister Kamala! aren't thou pretty! Kamala in the European costume! Kamala with the flowing train!"—for she had drawn down the loose end of my *cheera* into a train, and I couldn't pick it up and restore it on account of the great speed. Everybody laughed and enjoyed the fun immensely and I laughed too! Indeed, there was no swinging for the next ten minutes but only laughter and laughter and unsuccessful attempts by the younger ladies to work on each other the mischief initiated by my original friend.

I once had a discussion with Miss Lovely upon the comparative graces of the dresses of Hindu and European ladies. She opposed me at first from pure love of opposition, but soon told me that the Hindu lady's dress—simple, free and comfortable, yet smart and

graceful with the living folds and the flowing mantle—was admired even by European ladies, who, however, as much slaves to custom as anybody else, couldn't get over the complex machinery of their costly, cumbersome gowns—which, ever changing in style and fashion, ruined many a husband—nor discard the plumage and foliage and floriage on their heads. My friend told me also that her own class stuck to the Hindu style with some slight variation, but for her own part she best liked the pure unmixed style—which she had a great mind to try some day—though of course she obeyed custom and fashion in that as in many other things.

And auspiciously enough, for the first time yesterday, on our great swinging holiday, my friend Miss Lively Lovely joined the Hindu fold! and must she not participate in the swinging? I proposed that she must go into the central swing, and after a few no-thank-yous she yielded to my pressure on condition we should swing together, and, cunning girl she had already tucked her garment underneath her gold belt! Just then it flashed upon my brain that she had come there prepared to swing, and had not worn our dress without a purpose! and I confronted her with my discovery. She lit a sweet smile on

her ruby lips and patted me on my back, and dragging me into the big swing and getting into it herself on my left, told Bháratí to swing us softly and gently ; and knowing Bháratí did swing us as gently as ever mother did her babe. The other swings stopped moving, for every one was attracted by the unique spectacle of the lady lovers. Dearest, how could I tell you in words, the celestial joy which filled every cell of my heart? My youthful friend drew close to me, her arm now round my waist now over my shoulder, and placing her head close to mine touched my chin and cheek alternately, and calling me her dearest dear darling dearie kissed me and whispered jolly words in my ear ; — oh ! I laughed and she laughed and everybody was convulsed with laughter, and Bháratí wouldn't cease swinging though in the name of mercy I begged her ever so much. But my laughter soon left my heart, for I pictured you into the place of my lively friend and felt the disappointment. Oh, the buoyancy of the mirth and the depth of the depression ! The very thought throws me down, and I can write no more !

LETTER * XXXVII

I HAD scarcely sent my letter to the post yesterday noon when Ranga startled me with her voice.

"What! ever at your desk!" said she, "ever brooding! What new fancy are you weaving, Kamala, with your eyes closed?"

"Oh!" said I, waking up from my reverie, "I have just finished a rather long letter and sent it to the post."

"Great heavens! You must be a genius, Kamala," said my friend, "to be able to write long letters every day, and learned letters too, I am sure. I wish your husband will make a book of them and publish them for the benefit of the world, and do them too into English and other languages."

"And if ever he does it, Ranga," said I, "you will go for no mean share of its contents."

"Ah you silly thing! have you been writing to him all the nonsense we were prattling!" she exclaimed, "I will hold my peace to-day,

and besides, I cannot stay very long. I have come to bid you goodbye, dear."

"When do you leave?" I asked and after a short pause added, "I wish I could accompany you, Ranga; I am feeling so—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted my friend, "you will be alright when the sun dawns, that is all. I am leaving to-morrow evening, Kamala, and if I come alive from my holy visits and holy baths, I hope to see you in about six months' time."

"That is, if I am alive," I added. Then taking out a ring from my desk, I put it on my friend's finger, saying, "Keep it, dear Ranga, and let it remind you, during your holy visits and baths, of this poor soul here and transmit a ray of their holiness and virtue."

"Thank you, thank you, Kamala," said my friend, "indeed I will pray for you everywhere. I will pray for you and yours."

"And for me, too!" suddenly spoke a voice. "Won't you pray for me, too, dear Ranga?"

Miss Lovely was with us in another second and she was now dressed in her usual style.

"I will, my dear," readily responded Ranga, "I'll surely pray that you may be blessed very soon with the sweetest and dearest and youngest of loving husbands."

“O dear,” exclaimed our merry friend, “none of your husbands for me please! They are a selfish lot and cheating. I am content to be as I am—Miss Lively Lovely as sister Kamala calls me—and you haven’t heard perhaps that I have joined the Hindu fold! and we have it in our heads, me and Kamala—my dearest dear darling dearie Kamala and me—to seek the solitude of some high hill, and feeding on purest air and water, send up prayers to Heaven to convert us into angels with wings, that so we may flutter far and near and watch the ways of the wicked world. I have been there to select a spot and have come here to take our friend, and if you would abridge your orthodoxy, dear Ranga, you could follow too!”

We were thrown into a titter by my friend’s lively picture. But it looked the very ideal of bliss to my imaginative brain, the three of us away upon the top of a lofty mountain, removed from all the world, knowing nothing of love except that which can exist between cognate souls for pure unselfish ends. And I do think, dearest, that after all the highest, purest and noblest love in this life is not that of man and wife, but of woman for woman, which passes all and is next only to the love of God implanted in the human soul.

"And I promise you, dear Ranga," resumed our mirthful friend, "if you will follow us, I will never once talk of any delicious mutton soup ——"

"Oh horror!" exclaimed Ranga in confusion.

"or roasted beef ——"

"Gods!" cried out my sensitive friend.

"or beef-and-onion sauce ——"

"O Mercy!" uttered my friend, closing her eyes.

"or fried oysters, or fish cakes, or veal pie or partridge pudding!"

Ranga had shut her ears with her two hands which she removed only after the list was completed.

"Or stewed mushrooms, and that's the last!" said my friend, reassuringly.

She then entertained us with a description of her visit to the Hills and told us about the imposing grandeur of the scenery, the rich verdure in all shades of green, the huge high trees thick with foliage, the still shining lake, the singing silvery stream, the thundering waterfall, the narrow winding paths, the irregular piles of stones, the white-capped peaks, the over-hanging canopy of clouds, the wooing whispering breeze, the beautiful pink sunrise, the crimson sunset, the glorious rainbow, the magic moonlight, and last not

least, the solemn stillness of solitude which turns one's thoughts away from the selfish, sinful stream of life far far below, to God's heaven above, almost within reach. We listened with rapt attention and fancied ourselves the while on the high hills and felt indeed reluctant to awake into the actuality of life.

Then for a while I played the Veena, for Miss Lovely wouldn't take my excuse that I had lost all practice on the instrument. When I had finished treating them to my latest acquisition, which seemed to please them both immensely, my playful friend took the pair of spectacles from the shelf—your old one you had left here—and placing it on my nose, began to hail, "Sister Kamala with spectacles! ah, how learned you look with them!" Mischievous Lovely!

I then showed my latest whim to my friends, and they admired it and said it was a perfect likeness. Miss Lovely indeed wanted me to kiss you in the presence of the two witnesses, and when she couldn't get me to do it, she said she would do it in my name and—brazen thing—did it! and saying that she had brought your kiss for me, deposited it on my cheek!

Immediately after, both friends bade me goodbye, and they will be leaving this eve-

ning, though in different directions. Oh that I should sit here with my best beloved things far and away!—yourself, my very life and soul, and Ranga and Lovely, the pride and glory of my sex.

LETTER XXXVIII

OH, the descent from the pure serene atmosphere of the Hills into the busy bustling plains below! To the right, to the left, before and behind, everywhere you breathe dust and disease. But, thanks to the mercy of a kind Providence, in the midst of disease we are in health. Some disease positively brings pleasure to the sufferer and happiness to the rest; and it is no small satisfaction to note that disease of this wholesome kind is spreading, slow but sure, and the Powers are not averse to its propogation.

Dearest, have you heard of the new maladies popularly known as the 'name-fever' and the 'title-fever'? You may not meet with them in your small place. They attack rich people, no matter how the riches have accumulated,—by honest work and thriving trade, or by scheming treachery, or dishonest bankruptcy, or servile sycophancy, or ignominious immorality, or bribery or corruption,

or by inheritance and legacy, or by pure luck and chance. Wealth, however got, seems to be a power and means to many things in this wheedling world ; but even here, beyond a certain limit, wealth is but filth and breeds disease of various kinds, the 'name-fever' and the 'title-fever' being the most acceptable of them, for they are of the peculiar type which purges the patient and benefits the by-standers.

Do you notice, from time to time, the announcements in the papers about charities? They are not necessarily indications of any fever anywhere though they may be meant to communicate fever to others, for indeed most charity is contagious, especially charity which leads to guerdon or acknowledgment.

It is said that we are essentially a charitable people, and no wonder, because if our great religion teaches anything, it teaches the noble principle of Contentment and the nobler principle of Love and Charity. Our country indeed teems with charities of many classes : —choultries where the weary traveller finds a ready resting place, and not seldom the starving pilgrim pacifies his hungry stomach; wells and tanks filled with the very milk of human kindness; and temples and places of worship, where men and women may prostrate

before the visible symbols of the Almighty and pray to Him. But how is it that many of these charities—at least, many of those of the olden times—do not reveal the names of the great benefactors of mankind, to whom they owe their existence? How is it that we find no slabs with inscriptions, no posts with sign-boards, no dedications to any human potentate? Had those good men no ‘name-fever’ or ‘title-fever’? Did they spurn honours as bubbles and baubles, and were they free even from ‘that last infirmity of noble mind’—the love of fame? Then oh, the golden days of this country are past, and too true are the poet’s words—

“Who builds a church to God, and not to fame,
Will never mark the marble with his name.”

Beloved, I am sick of seeing the inscriptions of names and titles on the present-day charities, and it may be, in many cases, the perpetuation was not bargained for by the donors. All the same, the inscriptions stare you in the face wherever you go—in hostels and hospitals, in choultries and rest-houses, on tubs and fountains, on stiles and on shelters. I remember having seen them above the door-way of almost every room in a choultry I happened to visit sometime

ago. But the funniest idea I have met with is that of the good man who has constructed a water-pipe in front of his own house and embellished it with an inscription bearing his name ! Heaven bless him for his honesty ! Ha ! what a relief it is, amidst so many proclamations, to find a solitary lamp-post which tells you only that it is "A Charity" !

This morning I happened to pass by a new Charity House, which was no exception to the rule, and it seemed all the greater pity, for the particular charity struck me as indeed a most noble one. There was quite a crowd gathered in front of that magnificent edifice—cripples with crutches, helpless blind with their little leaders, withered starvelings clad in rags, thin emaciated forms, feeble skeletons, shrivelled skins and sunken eyes—oh, such miserable shadows of life truly, it seemed to me scarcely less noble to relieve their suffering than to promote the well-being of those better-placed.

I couldn't, if I wished, turn from them in disgust. Who knows but in God's sight they are better than any of us in these rich robes ? Who knows but they are a lesson to Humanity—a trial ordained to measure our love of God by our love for our fellow-beings, for surely they are His creatures !

I wonder, how many of our rich men and rich lords will be saved by their riches on the day of reckoning,—what fate will befall those amongst them, who, unmindful of the many unhappy beings around, drive a team of four and lounge in the softness of down, yea, eat from very silver and gold. Do they know that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God? Then why don't they think of Charity whilst yet they live—Charity apart from title and fame, Charity from pure humanity, which, feeling pleasure in the pleasure of fellow-beings and pain in their suffering, does its duty by God and by Man and blows no trumpet nor seeks any praise or reward? Yet how much these rich great spend and spend *on* Vanity and *for* Vanity!

Indeed, it is true that Vanity has done more for mankind than Charity. How often we see many a rich man who has never been guilty of helping a poor deserving school-lad and many a sordid lickpenny who has never thrown a copper to a famishing beggar, in response to tickles or in expectation of tails and titles, burst forth into a sudden and extraordinary manifestation of munificence! It seems to be a general principle with such

souls never to give aught in charity unless the gift is likely to get them a good name or cover a bad one ! Oh, these bartered charities and the mean love of name and fame !

LETTER' XXXIX

DEAREST, — It is an odd thing but methinks after all the miser is the most charitable of human beings — the miser who, discarding every selfish pleasure, accumulates his hoard all his life and leaves it in one big lump to others, to be used for such purposes as they may deem fit. He is certainly more charitable than the spendthrift who runs through his money before he runs through his life, borrows heavily and ruins others; and decidedly more honourable than the man who undergoes the bath of Insolvency to crystallise into a better form combining beauty with benevolence!

There is only one human being who beats the miser in his charitable disposition. It is the man who insures his life for a large sum and shuffles off his mortal coil to benefit others. Whatever you may say about his sin in committing suicide, it must be more than atoned for by the charitable purpose which has prompted it.

Dearest, I have actually made a great discovery! but I don't know how to obtain a patent for it. It is a Touchstone for True Love and Affection, the only drawback about it being its rather heavy price. News comes from afar that a young husband whose life had been insured, passed away from this world, and the loving wife has been worrying herself about the insurance money from the second day of her sad bereavement, while the affectionate brothers are claiming it for themselves as being members of a joint family! It makes one think that Insurance Companies are perhaps our only well-wishers. Now, can you guess the great touchstone I have discovered? It is 'Insurance' *plus* 'Death' or something equivalent to it!

Really, when I seriously think about it, an insurance policy seems quite as dangerous a thing as an 'adopted son'¹, at least on occasions. I can now understand the wisdom of a

¹ Amongst Hindus, the adoption of a son by those who have no male issue, is a regular institution and there is a whole complicate law pertaining to it; a son being considered absolutely necessary not merely for the perpetuation of lineage but also to perform the funeral ceremonies of the father and to secure him happiness in the next world by giving periodical offerings every year. The adopted boy gets completely severed from his natural family and is for almost all purposes regarded as having been actually born into the new one.—EDITOR.

well-to-do old schoolmaster who always not only abhorred the idea of insurance, but never would let his adopted son or any one else know anything about his moneys or the places where he kept them. And it seems to me he was not over - cautious. For I have heard of an adopted son who made short work of his father's life for the sake of his wealth, which was considerable, and who, if he escaped the law, could not escape the hand of Retribution which soon scattered the money to the winds. Indeed, this world is wonderful and we truly live to learn — the ways of Love and Charity.

LETTER XL

DEAREST,—I seem to be somewhat of a prophet in my own way. I wrote to you only on Saturday evening about Retribution, and yesterday, Sunday, the word was on the lips of everybody! I have delayed this letter to verify my information.

Empty—for no one now calls him even Empty-Rám beaten within an inch of his life, at midnight on Saturday; his hair all cut off; his moustache badly scissored; his face besmeared with dirt and dung; his hands manacled; a string of old shoes tied round his neck; and his almost bare body chained and locked to a lamp-post in the big street, right in front of the large storied habitation, the Students' Lodge! I have read of a similar thing somewhere, but this beats all.

Luckily for Empty, one of the students—a relative of his—happened to see him before it was quite day-light, and though a carpenter had to be called into service, yet

liberated he was very soon, and with the aid of a confidential barber and a set of clothes, in an hour's time he became the usual Empty again, but urmoustached! And it seems he actually went to Court to-day, although he had no work whatever, and explained to his inquisitive brothers-in-law that it was an 'In Memoriam' to his departed wife, and told them he would grow a fresh moustache as he had wedded a new wife! •

The secret has however oozed out, each person communicating it to but one under the strictest seal of confidence. For not only had some naughty students, who were no relatives of Empty, caught sight of him at his best and watched his subsequent metamorphosis, but three sweeper-women passing that way about dawn, had seen him before anybody else, and accosted him too with their brooms! And you know a secret is safe with three or more persons, only when all of them are dead save one.

Poor Empty! I pity him from the bottom of my heart. But how, how could he escape Retribution even in this life?

LETTER XLI

DEAREST,—I think I am growing a bit vain and conceited. What else could you expect of a girl who has been left at large by her loving lord! But really, do I not look handsome in this new *cheera*, or does the glass deceive me? Why do you stare at me so and smile without saying a word?

By the way, how did you like the description I gave you of the goddess in the Hindu dress? Does she compare favourably, or at all, with the fairies in your place? How is it you don't write anything now about these new friends of yours?

I have yet to tell you that your namesake presented me a beautiful *cheera* at the close of the wedding. Why didn't you ask me about it? You had a hand in the selection of it, I am sure, otherwise how could he hit on the exact colour and kind I had once told you I liked best? Ah! you are both one—practically—I know, and it is a fact there is

no confiding in you males. Who knows how many secrets we reveal to you in all innocence get communicated the next moment to your friends? Possibly it adds to your pride and delight! Do you suppose *we* ever betray you to the best of our friends?—alas! the gulf between man and woman! So many things the one does, the other never knows and never can know, be the two wife and husband and ever so loving! If you wish to know the ways of women, disguise yourself as one of them and mix with them and watch them!

Dearest, will you do it! But *can* you do it? I think you are a bit darkish-coloured, or rather you are not fair-coloured enough for a lady—I mean a good-looking one—and the growth on your lip and the spots about your face, make the feat hopeless for you, at least now as you are. If you are of a different opinion, try it when you come here—I will give you my best *cheera* and myself don your garb. I am sure I sha'n't fall in love with you! Ah! do not call me a naughty girl but kiss me for this candid criticism.

I wonder if ever you were on the stage in your schoolboy days, and wooed or got wooed by your schoolmates. So many of our lads

do it now and satisfy their youthful fancies, though the teachers grumble that the stage-mania is spoiling the students. Why, some years ago, when I was a girl to everybody, I happened to attend along with my father an amateur performance in which many lawyers and officials took part, and I was simply disgusted with the appearance of most of the false ladies. They hadn't one womanly grace about them and looked no better than so many dolls on the stage! and even as such, they were pretty bad specimens of us, but slightly better than the figures of low-caste women and pariah women you often find on Indian Christmas Cards. All the same, the audience admired the characters and cheered them and appeared mightily pleased with their masculine talk! Is it that *any* woman pleases man, or was it only a formal cheering akin to the flattery so common in this world?

Do you see, dearest, woman can play the double part to perfection whereas man cannot? He is too rough for the woman's part, except when he is yet her pet and playmate—a boy-man. I never liked any performance of men except that of the *Pársees*. They are at least handsome, though for graces of speech and movement, they are not very

much superior to our own men. One thing in the Pársee Theatre which always absorbed my soul was the beautiful dance of the fairy boy - girls in their brilliant fairy costumes, so dazzling and fascinating. And such a graduated group too, of buoyant bewitching things stepping to the rhythm of a mirthful march in front of the Fairy - Queen—oh! the dance always drew the loudest applause from the house and there was always an *encore* for it.

Beloved, have you seen the Fairy - Queen? Do you wish to see her? Look! here she is before you! and there too, on your right! Indeed, doesn't she look handsome in that beautiful sky-blue—your own selection—with those brilliant diamond ear-rings and the ruby bracelets—your present—her hair so daintily done, the red dot on her forehead and—let her try the spectacles too!—ah, isn't she simply sweet! Kiss her, dearest, kiss her!—You *won't*?—Well then, *she* will kiss you!—

Ah! what a fool I am—to run there to kiss you and to find that you have not moved at all from your place! I have hit my head against the glass and kissed myself into the bargain!

Oh what foolish fancy is it which sends this thrill through me and burns me with jealousy!

I am losing my head! To fret that you are by the side of some fairy wench, and the next moment to discover the wench to be myself! Alas! I am taking reflections for realities and sinking deep into disappointment! Oh my disappointment! my disappointment!

LETTER XLII

DEAREST, — How is it your letters have become angels' visits altogether? Could you not spare a moment to scribble a line to your Beloved, or have you become a disciple of Empty and lost your liberty! Or is it that I am boring you with my long letters? You see it is the evil of giving girls 'eddcation'! It fills their brains with ideas and imaginations and so many other things and makes them no better than honey-combs. They are not content with being educated women — if indeed those who have not crammed your books nor taken your degrees, could come in that category — but they must *show* themselves as such, maybe to please their husbands; and why should I be an exception? But really, dearest, tell me, do you feel proud of your educated lady — educated, of course in her own way — and do you really think her letters learned? Then why have you not given her any title yet, (am I to teach you

even these little things!) beyond that of the 'poet' which is a dubious masculine one and I must say from experience, a very incommodious one! You males are a selfish lot, as Miss Lovely says, and you never think of titles for any one except yourselves!

An idea has struck me, dearest, as ideas have ever struck me since your departure and will never cease, I fear, until I go mad. It solves many difficulties, I mean the idea, and has come to me only through the sheerest observation. Let me tell you of it.

Do you remember I once told you about a huge odd-looking Timble-Tumble who used to be present every evening at the grass fair near here, amuse the grass-women, young and old, and collect from each a voluntary contribution of the green commodity which they brought to sell. Oh, they gave him their handfuls so willingly that one would have thought they actually loved him, everyone of them! and he was such a funny-looking Timble-Tumble too, with his shapely head not over-large, his protruding paunch, his swinging gait and his perfectly honest squint! and his grim elephantine smiles which were invariably accompanied with a toss of the upper portion of his structure, never failed to tickle his friends the grass-women into a

giggle and they apparently enjoyed the opportunity they had of combining business with pleasure. And who knows, as my good friend Tulasi used to say, but those odd smiles were the commas and the colons of an interesting paragraph of odd humour which we couldn't catch from the distance? We almost felt sure it must be so from the frequent wave of the hand and the index which was occasionally visible. Somehow, even from the distance, the scene used to excite laughter in us and we always enjoyed it—my friend even more than myself—and the inaudible eloquence of our droll orator certainly pleased us better than the bellowing of the street-preacher who now and then honours the locality. Indeed, my friend used to think that she was getting cured of her dyspepsia and never missed, during her stay, to be present here to enjoy the evening entertainment, which she liked so much, and she felt quite sorry when, all of a sudden, Timblejee disappeared from the scene and had gone away nobody knew where.

He has however come back, from a long pilgrimage as I have learnt—for it seems he is a *Sanyásin*,¹ though without the special

1 A *Sanyásin* is a person who has joined the order of monks or ascetics and relinquished all worldly connections. Sanyásins generally wear orange - coloured robes.—EDITOR.

garments, (which makes it all the more odd that he should spend his evenings' with grass-women),—and he has brought with him quite an original idea, a SCRATCHER—a big stout walking-stick with the head somewhat like a small hand, the fingers slightly bent. Ah! you should see him scratching his back with it, and the diagonal grin too which accompanies it!—the women are simply swooning with laughter and they have become much more liberal in their contributions, which he collects and sells on the spot, making possibly more money than any one of the women. God bless him! I wonder what a round-headed *Sanyásin* has got to do with money or with women, and I hope one day he will not run away with them all, for now and then I see him treating the bare backs of some of them to the agreeable operation of his seductive scratcher, the women submitting willingly too, and even courting the comfort!

Now to my idea. It is a modification of Timble's, or rather an improvement upon it—an Adjustable Scratcher which will enable one to scratch not only one's own back but also the backs of others whatever the distance at which they are situated! Won't it be a splendid thing, and isn't there a mint of money in the manufacture of the article?

I am sure it will command a universal sale, for it will give a practical effect to the universal idea — *You scratch my back, I scratch yours!*

But all my ideas are getting stolen or anticipated and I do not get any credit for them! Only yesterday I learnt that my idea about a universal caste-title had already taken a practical shape. It seems many learned *Pandits* and *Sástris* and *Védántins* ¹ of our city have constituted themselves into a Corporation or College for the free recognition of learning, merit and enterprise of every kind, irrespective of caste and creed, and the idea has been highly applauded by all the leading papers of the country. The Working Committee of the Corporation have framed a series of new titles in Sanskrit, which they propose to confer from time to time upon distinguished scholars and other deserving men. Indeed — and I wonder where I have been all these days — they seem to have conferred a few titles already on some distinguished men who have elsewhere earned other shorter ones. Amongst them, I learn, one is a judge, another a councillor, the third a lawyer,

¹ These are titles applied to Bráhmans learned in one or more branches of ancient Sanskrit lore, such as literature, logic, science, philosophy, law and the sacred *Véda* or religious hymns.—EDITOR.

the fourth a professor, the fifth a social reformer—I don't remember the rest. Every one of these has of course accepted the honours and the parchments, with the greatest self-complacency possible, for besides getting the ordinary puff in the papers, each has been flattered with congratulatory addresses and meetings and the like; and the wives of these great men must certainly be feeling doubly happy to see the lengthened tails of their dear husbands, for they can hereafter call them by handling those convenient addenda! (Of course, dearerest, I look upon things from my own standpoint.) But a bird whispers in my ear—not the same one which brought me the scandal about the great man's death—that, after conferring a few more titles on men of acknowledged worth and learning and thereby fairly establishing the status and respectability of the Corporation—for even here the Scratcher holds good—the Committee have an idea, a splendid one it seems to me, of extending the honorific titles to other deserving individuals, who, blanks in the intellectual field, have still distinguished themselves in their own way: notably, a rich millionaire—not of this Presidency—who is said to have withstood the shocks of repeated insolvency; a pariah snuff-exporter

who is said to be actually rolling in wealth: a sweetmeat-seller who has built a huge *mantap* ¹; an illiterate Zamindár ² who has given a large donation to the Corporation; and last not least, a gentleman popularly believed to be somewhat demented, who, having recently become a widow-widower, is now it seems proposing to marry a nautch-girl and thereby demonstrate his sincere love of reform, on the understanding that he should be dubbed an S. S. S.—*Sakala Suguna Sampanna* ³—the highest title of the Corporation. This is all a perfect secret yet, but I hope it will soon come to pass, for I have a great mind to watch the countenances of the great gods who are already sticking the tails supplied by the Corporation, as also the misery of their wives, should the husbands choose to drop off the additional appendages eventually!

Meanwhile, the title-fever has caught me too, the very fever about which I wrote to you barely five days back. Indeed, how

¹ A *mantap*, generally opposite to a temple, and apart from it is a portico standing on columns in which the sacred idol rests for a while during the processions on holy days.—ED.

² A *zamindár* is a landholder in India, corresponding to a petty baron, subject to the payment of land-tax to the Government.—EDITOR.

³ This is a Sanskrit title signifying 'one endowed with all good qualities.'—EDITOR.

could I escape it amidst such a contagion? And surely, I deserve a title, don't I, that have written so many learned letters! But I have no wealth to waste on titles, and my only shift is the SCRATCHER. Dearest, think of it seriously and tell me if it is all an empty idea, as empty as the Park for Hindu Ladies which you told me some good man had opened at a great cost. Tell me, really, Why shouldn't you confer a title on me or better present a medal to me, receiving in exchange a title or a medal for yourself, whichever you like best? Surely, it is a simple, sensible, practical solution of a universal want—thanks to Timble-Tumble!

LETTER XLIII

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF! What else can I say to you who, having taught me the strictest regimen of life *minus* love, violate the code yourself so badly? What is up with you and why have you, all of a sudden, become so passionately enamoured of me? Is it that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' or have my letters upset you?—my reference to the Land of Beauties; my remarks on Riding and Swimming; my description of the Swinging Scene; the charms of Miss Lovely—pray, what is it which has turned your mind to me so madly?

Oh! it is the dream—the day-dream and a wonderful dream too! How extraordinary that your description of me should be so on all fours with what I wrote to you only the day before yesterday!—the same *cheera*, the diamond earrings, the ruby bracelets, the red dot, and the gold spectacles too, which I put on for a minute just for the fun of it.

And probably the same hour, for your letter is marked Tuesday afternoon. Really, dearest, it is very wonderful. Did your spirit travel here at the time and see me in that exact style? Else, how could truth be revealed in dreams?

You know I have always believed in dreams, at least such dreams as were not 'bred of indigestion.' It was you who ever pooh - poohed them as the 'children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain phantasy.' Now, the truth has come home to the unbeliever, has'nt it! Compare your dream with my letter which reaches you to - day, and open your eyes, my wise man!

But there is one little point in the dream which does not tally with the reality. You say I looked so sweet and charming in that particular style, that you flew into my arms (not a bit of it, for you never moved from your place) and lo! I kissed you — (not at all, I kissed myself!) — and here you tack on a bit of poetry which well-nigh kills me! —

"O love! O fire! once you drew
With one long kiss my whole soul through
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew."

But these are not your lines, neither are they part of your dream: they are your own fanciful commentary which makes the dream

all right, for, barring the lines, all else is exact in every little particular!

Beloved and Beloved! oh, do you really want me to get mad, or why have you written this wonderful letter? I devour it again and again and feel I must burst. It is full of every sweet thing! You call me a 'fairy-princess'—the same as I called myself in my letter of Tuesday!—a 'priceless gem', your 'sweetest rose', your 'lovely full-moon', and you write:—"My own dearest darling, your form is ever before me and your voice is ever audible. Oh, how often my eyes feast on your sweet smiles and my ears on your delicious music! Every recollection fills my soul with ecstasy. Indeed, you have become part and parcel of my life and I feel without you I can do nothing, enjoy nothing! As I am writing this letter, your fairy form is by my side and I feel the touch of your delicate arms encircling me and the impress of your sweet lips kissing me!" Oh, what dear words!

My soul is paralysed with pleasure and I can write no more; indeed I can live no more without seeing you. I have curbed and controlled my love so long, I can do it no longer. I must either die or get mad! Won't you come, Beloved, and save me? This heart is full, it will burst if you don't come betimes and save it!

LETTER XLIV

DEAREST,—My head has been aching since yesternight and threatening to break into a thousand bits and fragments; so I gave up all hope of touching my pen for some days to come. But thanks to the balm I have just got and applied, I am feeling quite relieved, and the scrap of paper in which it has come rolled up has so amused me I cannot forego the pleasure of writing to you about it at once.

This scrap is an oddly torn bit of a big leaf, apparently from an old pamphlet of advertisements, and indicates the persons and firms that could send, presumably for price, the best recipes for some of the ordinary requisites of life; and it is a great pity the whole leaf is not available, and even the scrap is torn in the third column which contains the information about locality. A few of the persons and firms mentioned in the second column are indeed known to us, but the rest

are so obscure that if one does care to get the recipes, one must necessarily try for the firms in every important locality. I am sending you the scrap herein enclosed and you will observe that it covers a pretty wide range from conjugal felicity to immortality !

*

*

*

I wonder if you could find out the whereabouts of Rám Dás & Co., to whom we are referred for the recipe—so much needed at the present day—for ‘securing titles without trouble.’ I have a personal interest in the matter, of course!—I do stand very badly in need of a title, and you haven’t cared to help me to get one though I begged you ever so often !

You see the scrap is torn against item No. 10 — ‘to secure antiquity for a mere titular Rájáh’ —and the quarter whence the recipe could be obtained cannot be known. But it doesn’t matter, for the recipe itself is now known to many, a big body somewhere having once got it for his use. It is a simple but far from agreeable prescription and secures antiquity in three bounds :—

- i. To marry two or more wives.
- ii. To secure a family burial-ground or cremation-ground, according to custom.

- iii. When one of the wives happens to die, to notify the death of the *Senior* or *Junior Ránee*, as the case may be. This is indeed antiquity with a vengeance!

LETTER XLV

DEAREST,—I hasten to correct the information given in the closing para of my yesterday's letter. It seems after all the prescription for antiquity is a hoax and cannot on the face of it succeed. I should indeed lose faith in the whole list, if the firm from which the big man obtained his recipe was the same as that missing in the scrap, which unfortunately we have no means of comparing.

I am told that a temporary titular Rájáh's wife cannot, by any extension of grammar or courtesy, be styled a Ránee. Queen, Empress, Lady and Her Excellency—these are all right, because they are the ladies of actual potentates and rulers. So a Mahárájah has his Maháránee, a Rájah his Ránee, and a Zamindár his Zamindárinee, where there is real power or dominion, or the title is hereditary. But a mere temporary titular Mahárájah or Rájah can no more style his wife a Maháránee or Ránee than a Reverend

or an Honourable can extend his title to his better half. It is such a simple thing I am really ashamed of the blunder.

LETTER • XLVI

THE headache has left me but I am still feeling out of sorts and completely depressed. You don't know, dearest, how much your absence is affecting me and what a magic cure your arrival will effect. Do come, Own Beloved, for a couple of days and save me! It is no good locking the stable door after the steed is stolen!

My head is now indeed a perfect blank. I can hardly get any idea out of it. I have been turning over the leaves of an old magazine to see if I could find anything in it which will amuse me and I have lighted upon a most eloquent and touching address to the members of a Young Men's Union. I have read it with the greatest interest, especially the portion bearing on the Slavery of Custom amongst us, which I cut out and enclose herein. I am sure it will interest you equally—possibly in a greater degree. Pray, do go through it.

I have also come across a funny brochure which seems to say some extraordinary things about the 'Land of Ladies.' I will read it through and send it to you to-morrow. I hope this diversion will do me good.—Your ever loving and adoring.

ENCLOSURE

"GENTLEMEN, it is an extremely humiliating fact that our best and ablest men are slaves to Custom and Superstition. They are unable to act according to their conviction and are obliged to preach one thing and practise another—(hear, hear)—because the cursed fiend of custom constantly stares them in the face. We are literally crumbling under a slavery which no legislature can prohibit, no government can eradicate! The cruel tyrant of Custom is sucking the very life-blood of our society. (Hear, hear.) Whilst this many-headed monster continues his sway, we may rest assured our hopes are doomed to end in disappointment, our endeavours for progress are destined to be fruitless, and our very successes here and there are bound to result in failures. (Hear, hear.)

"Let us contemplate, to begin with, the time-honoured institution of infant marriage of which

we enjoy the exclusive monopoly in this wide world! (Laughter.) Marriages of boys and girls, who have not arrived at years of discretion and cannot understand the responsibility of the act to which they are subjected; marriages of little children in cradles, performed forsooth to please old parents or to satisfy the last requests of dying relations; marriages with this remarkable feature about them that you do not marry because you love but have to love because you marry—(Hear, hear)—gentlemen, our marriage is altogether an original conception which is puzzling the world of foreigners. It is impossible to imagine a greater enemy to progress or a greater hindrance to happiness than the mill-stone our young men find, early in life, tied to their necks. It is impossible to find a baser bond of slavery than the indissoluble union for life of a husband and wife that have not married each other. It is impossible to conceive of a more brutal, a more heinous traffic in human life than the gift, rather the sacrifice, of blooming young girls to old men with one foot in the grave. (Shame.) What wonder if many of our unions are but milk-and-water unions, all nice and pleasing except to the taste,—all quiet and happy except in the bed-chamber? (Laughter.) What wonder if some of our

matches are but lucifer-matches which ignite at the merest rub? (Laughter.) What wonder if at an age when the children of other nations are engaged in play and study and hardly think of marriage, our girls and our boys are widows and widowers? (Hear, hear.) What wonder if with little fathers and little mothers and little widows, we have become very little ourselves! (Hear, hear.) So long as our marriage customs remain unaltered, so long as we *must* marry our girls before they reach the age of discretion, so long as we prefer widowhood to maidenhood, so long there is absolutely no hope for reform and progress, no hope whatever for our country. (Hear, hear.) And what a parody upon marriage, much that passes in India by that name! How much our little girls themselves like to get married! Fine clothes and jewels, beautiful decorations and illuminations, flowers and fruits and sweets, the feast and the fun, the songs and the dances, the fireworks and the procession—what can be more tempting to a child's mind than these? 'Oh, I shall go in a coach and pair, and a large crowd will follow me!' thinks the innocent thing. But little does she know what comes after the fun; little does she feel that a yoke is put on her neck for ever!

“Then again, let us glance at the condition of our women. Deprived of all education, confined within the four walls of the house, seeing little of the world and knowing little of it, immersed in superstition and oppressed by custom, our women—to our shame be it said—are really no better than slaves! Whether from a feeling of jealousy, or from a desire to shield them against the ravages of our Mahomedan conquerors, we imposed on our women restrictions and customs which have degraded them to their present low condition. And now, unable to protect themselves and unfit to assert their rights and elevate their condition, our women—permit me to say it—are no better than our cattle, and verily have we become cattle-dealers and cattle-owners. We have degraded our women, and they have degraded us and our society. (Hear, hear). For as the poet says too truly—

‘The woman’s cause is man’s; they rise or sink
Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free.’

True words and solemn! We have made our women what they are, and we are reaping the fruit. Woman that elsewhere is to man a source of happiness and delight, is amongst us a source of anxiety and misery. Wife, designed as a helpmate to man in life’s journey, is amongst us a hindrance and

burden. Where is the wife amongst us that is a true partner with her lord in joy and in sorrow? Where is the wife that makes home a heaven on earth—a source of sweet delight which drives dull care away? Where is the wife of the *Mahábhárata*¹—

‘ A companion

In solitude, a father in advice,

A mother in all seasons of distress,

A rest in passing through Life's wilderness ’ ?

Indeed, we have no *wives* but women, no *homes* but houses. (Hear, hear.) For how can we boast of wives and of homes, we who cannot meet in our families, men and women, to dine together or to converse at one common place?—we who can tolerate (and who knows but some of us insist on it) our wives dining after we have done and often in the soiled leaves that served for our plates! (Shame.) How *can* we boast of wives or of homes, we who cannot approach our ladies but they must stand and bend their heads? (laughter)—we who cannot talk to our wives except in the bed-chamber and perhaps only at midnight; we who cannot even in illness watch and tend our wives or be watched and tended by them without rousing ridicule if not

¹ The *Mahábhárata* is one of the two great Epic poems of Ancient India and corresponds to Homer's Iliad. The other is the *Rámáyana* corresponding to the Odyssey. — EDITOR.

censure! How *can* we boast of wives, we who are ashamed to address them by their names, or address them if at all in no better or more endearing style than we do our menials! (Shame.) Truly, brethren, our treatment of our wives and our women is a disgrace and insult to humanity. (Hear, hear.)

“And how about our widows? One shudders to think of them! The child-widow is the unique product of the Indian soil, unknown in other parts of the world! (Hear, hear.) At the present moment there are over seven lakhs of child-widows in India, and it appears every third Bráhma woman is a widow! And to what can we attribute this if not to the pernicious and inhuman custom of infant-marriage? (Hear, hear.) In Bengal, amongst the Khulin Bráhmans, it is not unusual for a man to marry a dozen or twenty wives. One or two are said to have married as many as a hundred! Just fancy, gentlemen, a hundred widows, a hundred child-widows possibly, hanging on the death of *one* single individual! (Shame.) How horrible! How cruel! And of all the sad and sorrowful conditions of human life, that of the Hindu widow is the most miserable and most pitiable. Devested of her valuable clothes and jewels, deprived of her beautiful locks, subjected to fasts and penan-

ces, regarded with suspicion and looked upon even by her own parents and brothers as an inauspicious being,—(shame)—to the Hindu widow, death would be a thousandfold more welcome than her wretched existence. The slow torture of the flames has indeed disappeared but the slower torture of custom has fallen to her lot. The wonder is, *not* that some of our widows take refuge in rebellion and shame, but that so many are leading pure and exemplary lives, under conditions most painful and tormenting. (Hear, hear.) Gentlemen, my tongue fails me on this subject. It is too solemn, too sacred, too real, too true to need any description. Let me only say this,—until we do all in our power to rescue our widows from their unhappy condition, until we can make marriage as accessible to our widows as to our widowers and show to the world that we are human beings with human hearts, we must hide our heads in disgrace and in shame! (Hear, hear.)

“Now, brethren and countrymen, shall we not awake betimes and save our women and our posterity? Millions of our girls are being sacrificed every year at the altar of infant-marriage! millions of child-widows are groaning under the crushing weight of custom! millions of women are perishing in their dark

abodes! millions are crying from within the stone-walls of ignorance and superstition! — Shall we not open our eyes and our ears, aye, shall we not open our *hearts*? Shall we not shake off the iron fetters of custom? Shall we not educate our girls, yes, give them a sound liberal education which will make them good wives and pleasant companions? Shall we not allow our women the rights and privileges to which they are entitled — as human beings, as creatures of God? Brethren, will ye still be indifferent? Dutiful sons of India! hear ye not the wail of your Mother? Patriots and philanthropists! will ye not wake up from your sleep and combine? Combine and lead a crusade against the tyranny of Custom! In the name of Progress, in the name of Justice, in the name of HUMANITY, in the holy name of GOD, let us join hands and rush into the battle-field! Let our conviction inspire us with courage! Let the righteousness of our cause be our strength! Onward let us march! and let our banners proclaim the war-cry —

‘They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.’

(Loud and continued applause.)”

LETTER XLVII

AH! DEAREST, it is a very funny little book and I have read it through and laughed and laughed until there was no more laughing in me. It is not the same Land of Ladies as I saw some years ago but another and more wonderful country. I am sending you the brochure; read it and amuse yourself — it is well worth your perusal.

Well, in that strangest of all lands, it seems the ruler, the minister, the judges, the lawyers, the officials, in fact all servants of the state are ladies. Men are employed only in domestic duties and in the bringing up of children, the important function of giving birth to these being, however reserved for ladies! The men are moreover kept in *gósha* like some of our women here, the *gósha* commencing from the sixteenth or seventeenth year and terminating at the fiftieth. In some well-to-do families, it seems the husbands are locked up in huge iron cages! while in

the poorer families the ladies are content with locking them up in the bed-chamber, that is when they have to go out on their duties—this extraordinary procedure being adopted, as they say, to preserve their purity and to guard them against temptation! Then again, the men are not given any education worth the name though some of them are sent in their boyhood to the boys' schools in which women are teachers. Every boy is however taught a code of conjugal morality very much like that which is imparted to our girls here. According to that wonderful code, the husband must look upon his wife as his all-in-all and his sole aim in life should be the comfort of Her Ladyship. He must dine only after her, and, whether as a mark of respect or of love, in the same leaf in which she had eaten. When she happens to approach him, he must stand—on one leg!—not straight but slanting. And any the slightest violation of these precepts is visited with exemplary punishment. One thing more. In that strange country, the ladies are allowed to marry as often as they please, either during the life or after the death of their husbands; But the men may not marry again when they happen to lose their wives. The widowers are deprived of their moustache and when they happen to belong

to castes or sects which don't permit that growth, the tips of their noses are scraped off. In no case are the heads of widowers shaved because it seems the tuft of hair is found rather handy on occasions of awarding punishment to them !

Well, dearest, isn't that a very strange country? I had almost asked how many of you men would submit to your lot, if by the grace of any God or Goddess, we women should acquire an equally great power over you, and use it to your disadvantage in the way they are doing in that Land of Ladies! —how many of you would endure the treatment with the same patience, the same resignation and nobility with which many of us helpless women are now submitting to our lot. How many or rather how few, I wonder!

Beloved, do I exaggerate it in the least? Not at all! Even Ranga with all her philosophy, even *she* deplores the present miserable condition of our women and thinks there must be a speedy reform—of the ugly outgrowth and outcrust as she likes to call it. Oh! the eloquent lecture is still appealing forcibly to my mind.

LETTER XLVIII

DEAREST, — Your last letter was a tempest of love which upset my restless heart and sunk me deep in the ocean of despair and depression; but luckily for me, I found a buoy set float by young men, which saved me, and yesterday I thought I was actually breathing in the 'Land of Ladies! But to-day, oh, where am I? I feel I am neither on land nor in water, but floating in mid-air, actually gasping for very life in a thin atmosphere! Alas! who can save me? I fear, dearest, even *you* cannot, if it be all true. And how can it be untrue? Wasn't your dream true to the very smallest detail? Then why not mine? But let me tell you my dream and, leave you to give the lie to it if you can.

Well—last night, I slept on the open terrace in the lovely moonlight. I couldn't stand the closeness of the room and I felt so hot both in brain and body, I welcomed the cool rays of the Moon, and indeed I had

the finest sleep, and dreamt a most extraordinary dream towards day-break. I wonder whether I owe my dream to the Moon who seemed so affectionate to me, or to my Star which I fancied I discovered in the blue canopy before I went to sleep. The star winked at me, I don't know how often, and seemed to whisper something to me from the great distance; but I couldn't grasp the meaning, and in my effort to guess it I fell into a deep sleep. And the dream which ended it—oh! it was so beautiful, so sorrowful, so life-like, I can scarcely write about it.

Dearest, tell me, am I destined to be miserable? Are you going to kill me?—*you* who wrote to me such a madly affectionate letter only the other day! Alas! my dream is tormenting me. It seems so replete with meaning and warning! All of a sudden, Beloved, I found you seated on the tree like our GOD KRISHNA, and there were twenty of us on the ground dancing around, all loving you and dying for your loving call! But much as everyone loved you, I knew of course that you loved none but me—for you were mine, my own KRISHNA—and felt sure that the pleasure and pride and honor of your call were reserved for me; and wickedly enough, I was maturing a look of contempt for the other

creatures which I intended to send forth upon them from my high seat. But oh! you ignored me altogether and beckoned to two blustering jades to jump up, which they did instantly and sat on your either side. Need I say that my soul was scorched with a thrill of veriest mortification? Whilst the other ladies continued the dance, I stood lifeless, gazing at you and your chosen ones, in the most frantic bewilderment. But the worst of it was the dream ended there, for I awoke to the screeching of my pet. Oh, that my own pet should play your confederate! It is all so mysterious yet the mystery seems to be full of meaning.

Now, beloved, isn't that a dream which will drive *any* soul mad? Oh, I must dream it again and see the sequel! I will sleep in the same place every night — no matter if I shall get moonstruck — and pray the Moon and my Star to reveal the whole truth to me.

But really, dearest, tell me, Is my dream a mere freak of Imagination — a reflection, after all, of the legend about GOD KRISHNA and his many sweethearts which I learnt in my very childhood? How stupid, when one comes to think of it, that children should be treated to all manner of tales and legends and confused with metaphors and allegories and

other unwholesome puddings of wisdom and nonsense! Indeed, how dangerous that they should be told about trees that talk, of damsels that change into frogs and flowers, of giants and ghosts and angels and other imaginary things which the poor innocents, in their ignorance, take for realities! It does seem a very odd way of educating little ones, to teach them fibs and fancies and to expect them to unlearn the delusions in after-life correcting the strong impressions left on their tender minds, and to grow up truth-knowing and truth-loving!

But all the same, Beloved, let me ask you the question, though it is a foolish one, Am I *really* your Beloved, your *only* Beloved? Pray set my fears and fancies at rest and do not accuse your 'imaginative girl' of jealousy, for as she told you some time back, jealousy is but love at its highest pitch!

But why indeed should I feel any jealousy even if the dream be true? Are there not men who have married two, three and even four wives?—though the only person I knew who married four, was understood to have given a very rational explanation of his act, that he had done it to make sure of the four bearers of his corpse! for he was an old man and in his own day had seen the greatest

difficulty experienced at times to secure bearers, whose avarice knew no bounds, especially if the corpse happened to be a rich man's. (But poor fellow, it seems after all the plan did not succeed; for, in spite of the large sum he had promised in his will to each wife, two of them chose to abscond from their prisons and substitutes could not be found before his death which occurred a year afterwards.)

How did the 16,000 wives of GOD KRISHNA agree with each other I wonder. Perhaps, dearest, I am selfish, but I cannot help it—I cannot for the life of me see another soul by your side. It makes me think of strange and awkward situations, upon which possibly some light may be thrown by your friends who have married two wives and are supposed to live happily with them. I am almost tempted to ask them a few questions, but they are by no means pleasant ones and you may call them naughty! O dearest, dearest, do remain my own own dearest. Here are kisses for you—the sweetest ever given or tasted—*don't* you borrow them elsewhere if you are hungry!—Ever your loving and trusting.

LETTER XLIX

MY DEAREST,—The dream is making me miserable and everything seems to confirm my doubts and fears! My star has been against me these two months and now it has the cruel satisfaction of having opened my eyes, only to see me wretched and unhappy!

Is it after all an empty dream, and am I ruining my happiness with silly misgivings? How foolish of me to ask *you* to clear them! My heart is poisoned with suspicion, and anyway I fear I must bid goodbye to peace! for suspicion's dart makes a deep wound which never heals, or heals if at all leaving an ugly scar which may revive it any moment.

Dearest, I feel my head is thinking crooked. The commonest truths assume the garb of blunders. A joy that is shared, they say, is a joy made double; but to me it sounds like the rankest nonsense. A joy that is shared isn't even half a joy: indeed it is *no* joy, it is positive grief and poison to the heart!

Beloved, I think nothing can save me. I fear I am gone — completely — either way. Forgive me pray if I have wronged you : pity me if I have lost you. And if you still care for me even as I am, come to me or I am lost altogether ! I am sending my poisoned heart to fetch you — do come and take me in your arms and save me !

LETTER L

AGAIN, the common twaddle about a fair housewife being the husband's foe—I wonder who conceived the idea and put it into a proverb. He must have been a masculine and a one-eyed creature too! If a wife's beauty ever works the husband's ruin, how often a husband's wealth makes the misery of the wife!—for in men, not beauty but riches and rank and position play the devil which draws and dazzles womankind! To be sure, a fair housewife is never so much the husband's foe as a rich husband the housewife's woe. Ah, how perfectly the words rhyme! and what a beautiful couplet too! Let the world sing it hereafter—

A housewife fair is husband's foe,
A husband rich is housewife's woe.

Frail, foolish, fanciful woman! thou art enemy to thine own kind! But few amongst men, who, however great, however wise, can withstand thy temptation and do not become

dupes of thee!—few indeed who do not fall a prey to the intoxication of thy charms and thy smiles! Vain, worthless thing! why art thou fond of gold and glory and all giddy glitter! Woman—designed as heaven on earth—art thou hell likewise! Are the vows of men the veriest wind, and shall I cry out and sing—

“Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot on sea and one on shore :•
To one thing constant never.”

Ah, Dearest, I am dying! I know death is the only end of my doubts. Would I had never been born! My soul is dying by bits—I can no longer exist in this condition. Let me die, Beloved, for the sake of thy sweet name!

LETTER LI

WHICH rules the world, Woman or Money? I have hitherto thought it was Woman, for she was designed by God to be man's help-mate and guide in this journey of life. And for a truth, Woman does steer the course of the world: wealth ever jumps from coffers to dance before her smiles, while wisdom takes shelter in her bosom and pride and power prostrate at her feet! Indeed—

“While man possesses heart or eyes
Woman's bright empire never dies.”

And it is very true that ‘one hair of a woman can draw more than a hundred pair of oxen’!

That is the perfect woman, the noblest creature of God, the woman that is proof against the touch of gold. But oh! where is she? The world is filled with worthless wenches whose vanity makes them slaves of wealth, and Woman, potent as she is, has abdicated her throne to Money which has become omnipotent!

Dearest, what nonsense I am writing! Alas! I am gone, hopelessly gone! My suspicion has bitten me, and the poison has reached my brain. Everything looks distorted to my mind. Oh, let me die, Beloved, and let God breathe a new life into me!

LETTER LII

AH me! yet another dream and more mysterious still! Since Tuesday, I have been praying the Moon and my Star to send me back my old dream but they haven't granted it. They have sent me another and this time a most terrible one, as if to punish me for my pestering!

I was attired like the Circus damsel and I had wings. I flew right up towards the Moon, high into the lofty sky. I flew and flew but there was no end, though I went above the clouds and the earth was hidden from my vision. The air grew chill, my eyes became dim and the Moon loomed large, and I felt I was growing large too! But I got exhausted and could hold no longer, when my wings collapsed and I thought it was all over with me. But lo! to my greatest wonderment, my descent was slow and beautiful, as ever lady's was with a parachute, and I set my foot on land, safe though sleepy; and

my wings instantly disappeared and my dress was changed! Oh, it was all so enjoyable yet so terrible!

Dearest, tell me pray what it means. Have I fallen from my high position yet not blown into bits and atoms? Oh misery! never in my life was it so bitter! My heart will burst with grief! It is crying! Dearest, don't you hear the cry?

LETTER LIII

OH, my bliss was too much to last! I didn't play castles for nothing when I was a girl, the best I built with my cards lasted but a minute! And many and loftier the castles I built during these two years—castles in the air, more beautiful and more deceitful! Oh! they have all come down and crushed me underneath their terrible weight. Ah me! my dreams of happiness, they have vanished!

It is my fate and the curses of the world! cruel fate which has separated us so soon and turned my happiness into the worst of miseries—I must have been a most unholy sinner in my life before this! And the curses! oh, the bare recollection frightens me. How many of your people and how many my own talked ill of our union and still do! It is the world—the jealous, envious, malicious, mischievous world! How I burn with rage! I feel I am at the mouth of a volcano. The flames will soon consume me!

LETTER LIV

WHAT! not a word in reply! not one word even to save my life! Yet it is *six* days since I wrote to you about the wonderful dream which has upset me, and I have written to you as many letters full of my madness and suffering.

Is the world after all a cheating world? Is there no truth, no sincerity, no love, no happiness? No justice and righteousness! Is everything a delusion, a deception, a monster mockery? Is life a huge Vanity of Vanities? Is there naught but selfishness and self-interest, naught but show and simulation?

Ah, the shock is too much for me to bear! To trust and be deceived!—it burns my very soul! Oh, I am lost, lost for ever!

LETTER LV

FOR a truth, a short while since, I sat on the top of the cocoanut palm we have newly planted in front of our house. I hid myself amidst the branches. The palm grew tall and then taller and taller until it touched the very sky. Then it bent so beautifully that its head was ever upright and I didn't know it was bending at all until I came right above the open courtyard of your house. And there, true enough, I saw yourself and your beloved fairies, the daughters of your landlord, on such terms of intimacy, oh it broke my heart! but before I could utter a word, the palm straightened and shortened and brought me home. And this is no dream, for I have just got down from the palm and the bruises on my arms are still visible! Beyond the shadow of a doubt, I have seen your good deeds! and your fairies were the same wenches who sat with you on the tree. Oh, it is all true, too true, and I am undone!

LETTER LVI

DEAREST,—I still call you my Dearest, for that to me you are, though to *you*, I have ceased to be. I didn't write to you these two or three days, for I have been in another world altogether, mixing with strange beings and moving in strange ways. Ah me! I cannot think of it. The fit will come on again and this time I may go stark mad and never more return to this world! Heaven save me from the plight!—I dread it worst of all. Oh, death were better far than madness! Yet, this seems to await me. Why, I have been in it already! How my head turns! what sinner I must be! Shall I end this life whilst yet I have the power? Ha! what a relief it would bring me! If I were only sure that I close it for ever or fall into everlasting sleep, or sleep here to awake in distant Arundhati¹, far far away from this

¹ *Arundhati*—the Hindu ideal of feminine virtue and chastity—is the little twinkling star, the wife of Vasishta.

worthless world, oh! I would toss this life away as if it were a toy. But to be born a pig or a puppy or an infernal cat[!]-ah, that makes me pause! GOD ALMIGHTY! Thou art my only prop and my only hope! '

the greatest of the seven great Hindu saints who are supposed to form the constellation known as the Great Bear.
Vide p. 97 — EDITOR.

LETTER LVII

THE horrid cat again! and oh, it was the first living thing which met me this morning after I left my bed! and already the evil omen has proved itself! My favourite pen, your present, is missing—the pen which was safe in its place these many days—and I cannot find it though I have searched for it everywhere in the house. I loved the little thing so much that I am actually crying over the loss and my mind is troubled with the omen. The cat has ever been my enemy and has not once failed in its forebodings and I tremble to think what more of evil it may brew for me. But why should I call it my enemy? Rather let me call it my friend, a wise and warning friend, and attribute the evil to my sin and fate!

LETTER LVIII

BELOVED, BELOVED, the worst *has* happened! My pet is gone! My sweet parrot is flown from the cage! and oh, it means so many things to me, I get mad if I think of them. My sweet one, I cannot stop here for one moment without seeing you. Do come and forget everything, and take me into your arms and soothe my mind. Oh, my brain is burning! I am eating my flesh and drinking my blood! Never before in my life did I feel so bewildered, so disconsolate. Oh, have mercy! have pity! If only you come and kiss your beloved, she will forget everything and be your own loving one for ever. Do come. Do come before I am completely gone and it is too late!

LETTER LIX

AH, your letter at last! and after so many days, because you were away on circuit! And what a half-hearted letter, so unlike the one I have got by heart! You treat my dreams lightly, and have the heart to say that my doubts disclose a shade of poetry in the background! Ah me! this blow when I am actually at Death's door, and for your sake too! O cruel man! were you born to kill me, and is killing your pastime? Why and for whom, indeed, are you going here "in a couple of weeks, positively"? Well have you rewarded me for my love! The happy time we spent together—ah, it was all a delusion, a dream from which I, now awake! I fancied I was your prisoner. You have now set me free and I am at large like my pet. I pray Thee, O GOD, take me away this instant! take me into Thy holy presence, for I am free from all earthly bonds and the task Thou didst allot to me in this life is done!

LETTER LX

THE Messenger has come! — a big strong man with a beard, a beautiful net in his hands which he is unfolding and getting ready for me! ... Oh, the mere glance of his eyes seems to draw me like a magnet! ... How it sends a thrill of happiness through my whole being! ... Aha! I am free from all bonds! ... My Beloved has forsaken me! ... My pet has flown away! ... My friend the Moon I couldn't see the whole of last night ... and my Star got lost in the multitude! ... Ah, my time is up! There! the net is around me ... I am going! ... Farewell, earth and everything! ... Farewell KRISHNA! ... I am gone — GONE FOR EVER!

